No. 281 / JULY 1996

THE NI NEW INTERNATIONALIST

CLASS out of the shadows

- ◆ Death of the middle class
  - ◆ Know your place! NI questionnaire
- ◆ Tony Benn & Studs Terkel interviews
  - ◆ The female face of the proletariat
- ◆ NEW: The NI Crossword

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◆

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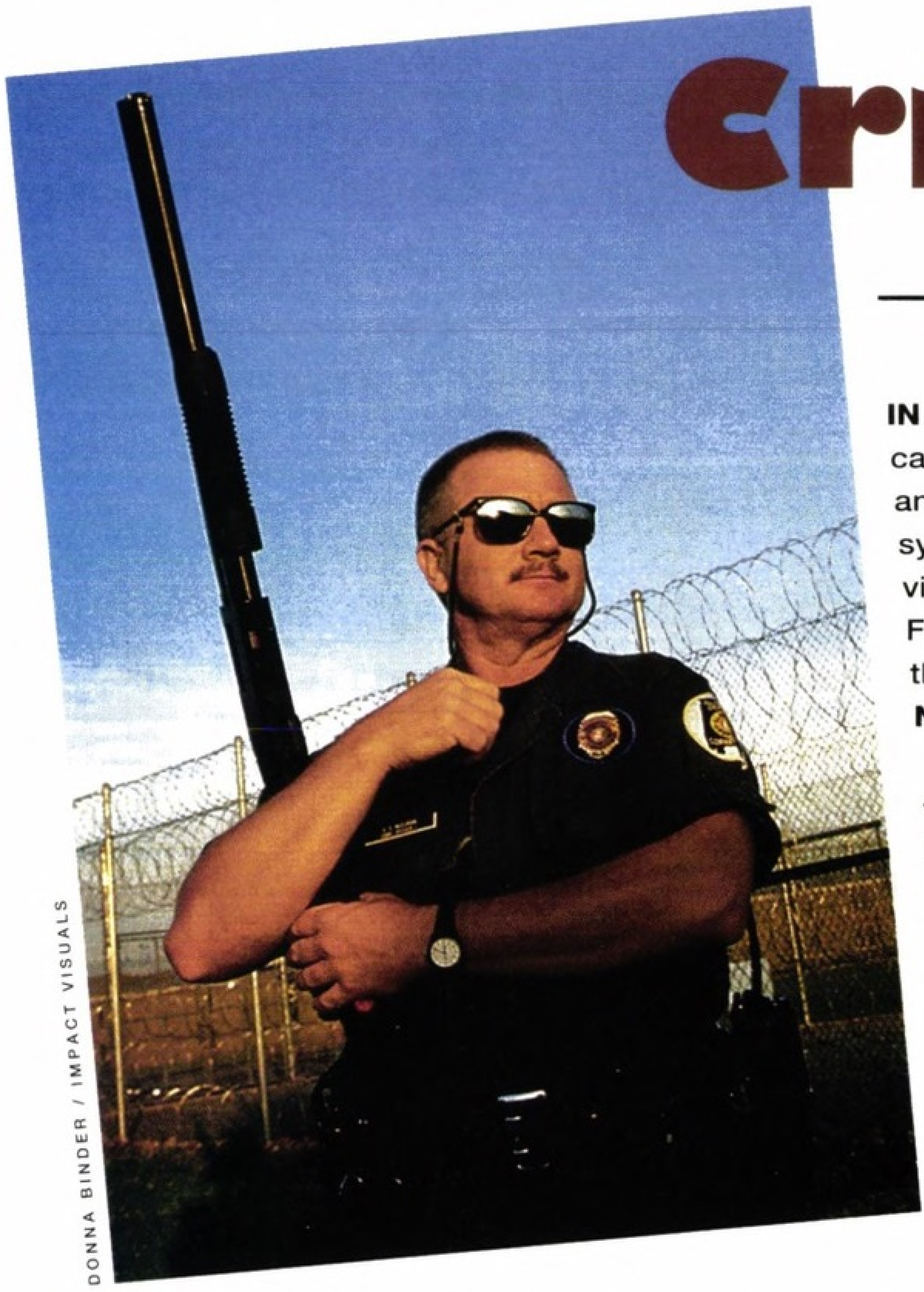
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The **New Internationalist (NI)** magazine was founded by Peter and Lesley Adamson in 1970. Together with a range of other publications it is published by New Internationalist Publications Ltd which is wholly owned by the New Internationalist Trust and co-operatively managed by:

Accounts: Damian Bourke.
Administration: Alison Ware.
Design: Alan Hughes, Andrew Kokotka, Ian Nixon, Clive Offley.
Editorial: Vanessa Baird, Chris Brazier, Nikki van der Gaag, David Ransom.
Editorial (North America): Wayne Ellwood, Richard Swift.
Magazine circulation: James Rowland.
Magazine marketing: Michael York.
Production: Fran Harvey.
Publications editor: Troth Wells.
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The **NI** Web Site:

http://www.oneworld.org/ni/

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Editorial and advertising offices

UK Editorial: 55 Rectory Road, Oxford OX4 1BW. Tel: (01865) 728181. Fax: (01865) 793152.
E-mail: newint@gn.apc.org **Advertising:** Tel: (01372) 361225/6. Fax: (01372) 361228.
Canada/US Editorial: 1011 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M6H 1M1. Tel: (416) 588 6478. Fax: (416) 537 6435.
E-mail: nican@web.apc.org **Advertising:** tel: (613) 826 1003 fax: (613) 826 1141
Australia: 7 Hutt Street, Adelaide, S.A. 5000. Tel: (08) 2321563.

Print and distribution

Origination: Graphic Facilities, London UK.
Printed on environmentally friendly paper by Cradley Print Ltd, Warley, West Midlands, UK.
UK news trade distributor: COMAG Specialist Division, Mercury Centre, Central Way, Feltham, Middlesex TW14 0RX. Tel: (0181) 844 1000. Fax: (0181) 751 2666.
North America. Publications Contract 101400. Postage Paid at Toronto. US 2nd class postage paid at Lewiston, NY. (USPS 329-770) US Post-master: send address changes to: New Internationalist, PO Box 1143, Lewiston, NY 14092.

Permissions and indexing

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Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index, CPI CD-ROM, CPI Online, the Canadian Magazine Index, CBCA OnDisc and the Alternative Press Index.

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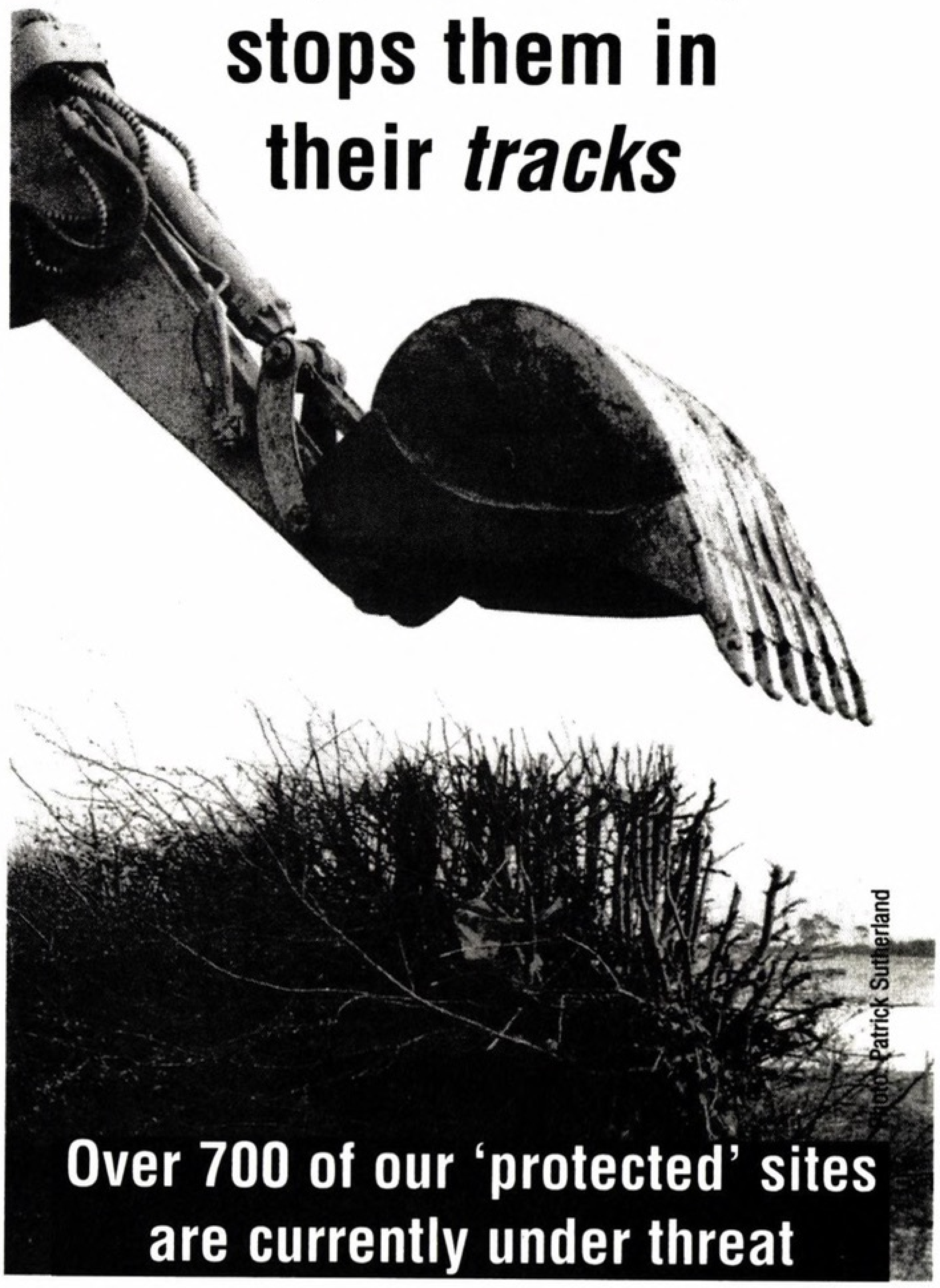

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MAKING KNOWLEDGE WORK

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NICK HEDGES

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: STEELWORKER IN JAMSHEDPUR, INDIA.
PHOTOGRAPH BY **DENIS DORAN / NETWORK**
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THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

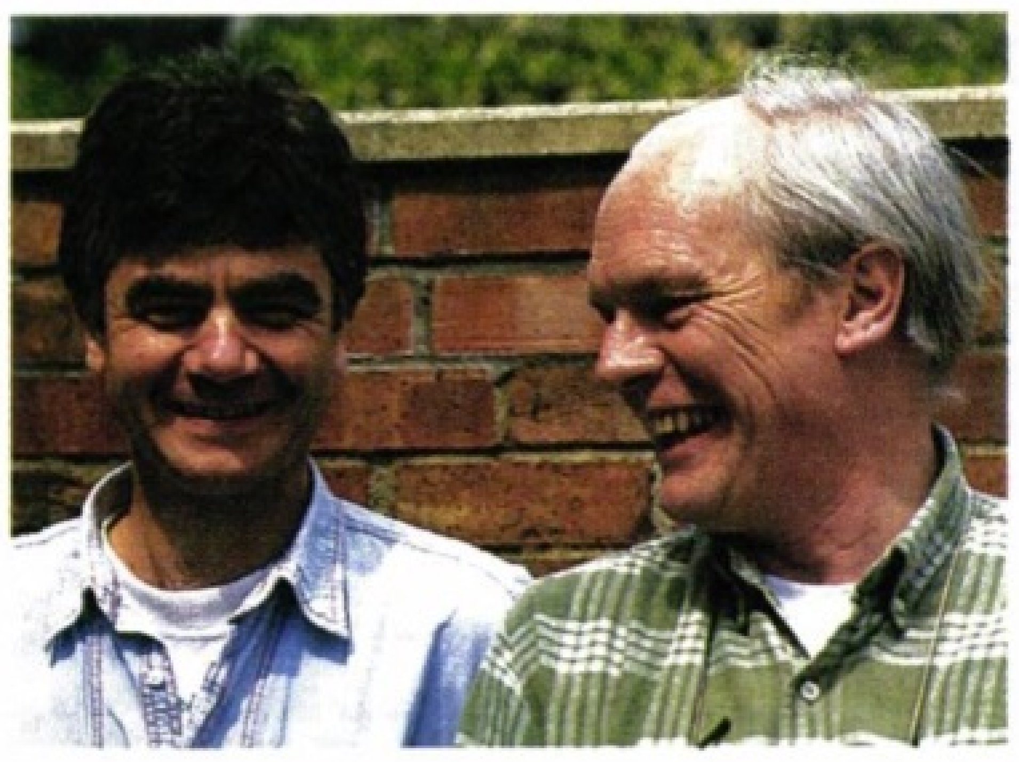
Class

FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITORS**

CLASS creates tensions that are leading some workplaces – in California for example – to add 'class-awareness training' to the list of appropriate therapies.

The **NI** is very much a co-operative, but even so a 'hidden hand' can sometimes be detected at work on our office politics. The design and office management teams on the ground floor – where Alan, who designed this issue, works – occasionally refer to themselves as 'the engine-room' or 'the trenches'; the editorial and marketing teams on the upper floors – where David, one of our editors, works – imagine periodically that they sit on 'the bridge'. From time to time a reasonably good-natured, low-intensity form of class warfare seems possible. In order to edit this magazine Alan and David have had, as it were, to bridge the trench: a painful posture which class-awareness therapy seems unlikely to change.

We ran a trial of the questionnaire that appears on page 14, asking some of our colleagues to fill it in to see where they feature in the class struggle. We assumed that everyone would, by virtue of an equal-pay policy and conventional wisdom, classify as 'C1' or 'middle'. There were, however, some perverse results. With a strange flourish, some people came forward with claims that they had achieved working-class status. Closer scrutiny revealed errors in the questionnaire, and a re-run duly evened things out.



'Class' has become one of those odd words that are used as adjectives rather than nouns. It is quite commonplace for someone to say 'working-class this', 'middle-class that' or 'ruling-class the other' – and remarkably rare for them to say 'the working class', 'the middle class' or 'the ruling class'. When we start to prevaricate with language it's a sure sign that something troublesome is afoot.

Some of the most interesting sections eventually had to be excluded from the questionnaire: the names we give our children; what we call the kind of houses we live in or the bodily functions we perform; the shops we use; the curses we utter. All of them betray something about the class system we live with and all are specific to the particular place where we live. The scope for the denial of common experience across cultural or geographical boundaries is pretty well limitless. Yet it is sometimes only by breaking down barriers that we can see things at all. Class, in a global supermarket, is one such thing.

Mad Cow Disease has come to our rescue in Britain by displacing class as 'the British disease'. The perception that class was a uniquely British obsession has prevented the **NI** from tackling it before. It was Alan – perhaps the only one among us whose personal experience told him why – who insisted that we must do so eventually. In the event, we could have filled the magazine many times over with revealing stories about how class operates around the world and the terrible constriction on the human spirit that it imposes, without mentioning Britain once. For both of us the experience has been a revelation.

You may not be entirely surprised to learn, nonetheless, that because Alan says 'class' as in 'mass', and David says 'class' as in 'art', it seemed possible at one stage that we would fail to understand each other at all and that this magazine would never have materialized.

David Ransom

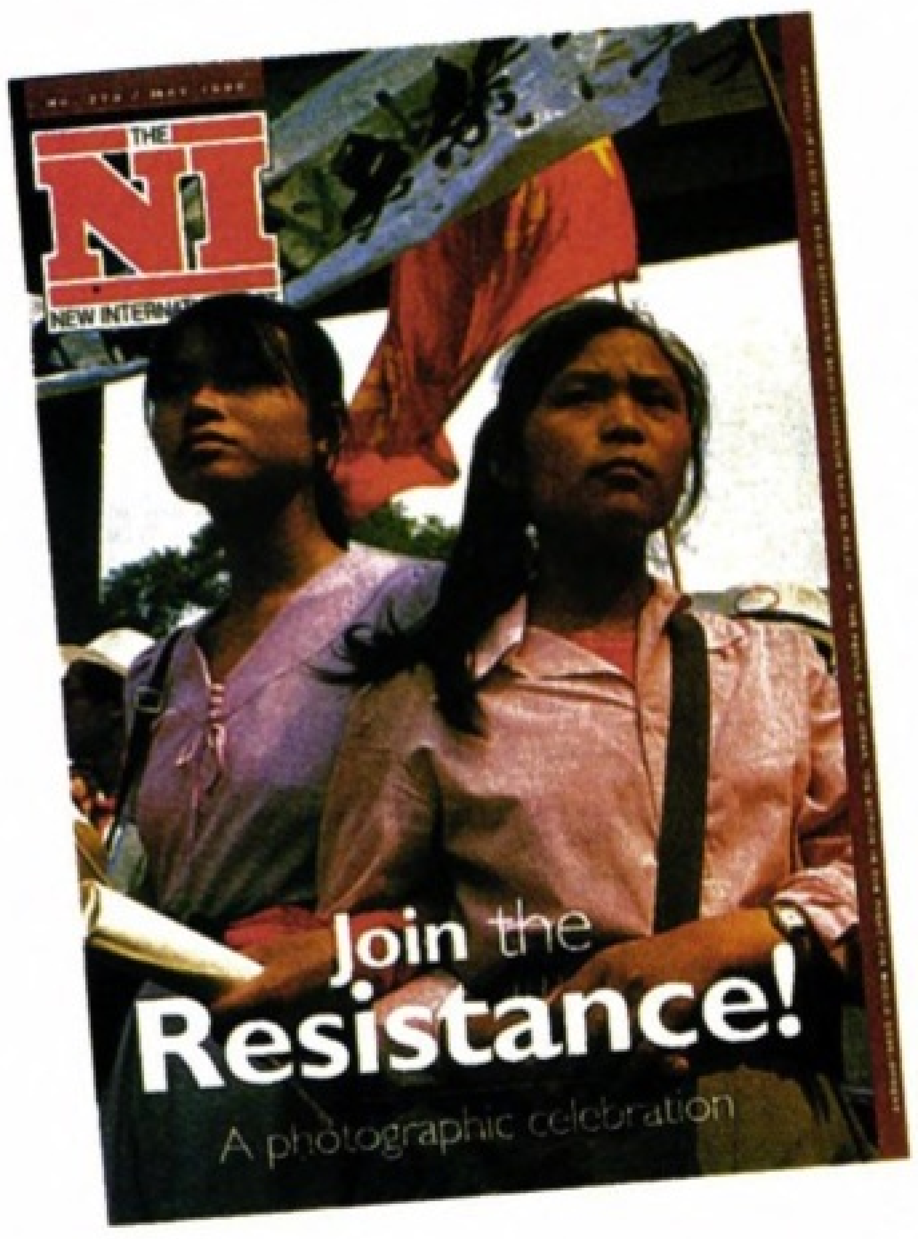
Alan Hughes** and **David Ransom
for the New Internationalist Co-operative

Letters

The New Internationalist welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address and e-mail are inside the front cover.

Inspiring Kurds

I was disappointed that there was no mention of the Kurds in your issue on ***Resistance*** (**NI 279**), except a letter which follows Turkish propaganda in viewing the (Kurdish) PKK as a so-called 'ruthless, bloody terrorist group'. Though normally a pacifist, I find the Kurds' resistance to the genocide they are facing in Turkey extremely inspiring; it is one of the most significant conflicts of our time. Turkish repression is ruthless and bloodthirsty in the extreme; thousands of Kurdish villages have been destroyed and countless Kurds tortured and killed.



The PKK, which enjoys the support of probably 90 per cent of Turkey's Kurds, is full of young men and women genuinely inspired by the love of freedom. They have repeatedly tried to get the Turkish Government to negotiate rather than fight, scrupulously avoided targeting civilians and have observed the Geneva conventions, calling on Turkish soldiers to do likewise. They require the support of all open-minded people.

Felix Padel
Fishguard, Wales

Editor's note: The Kurdish cause was featured in NI 275.

Zapatistas

I'm glad the Zapatistas were acknowledged in your last issue (***Resistance* NI 279**). Keen supporters of the Chiapas Indians will have heard Don Samuel Ruiz, Bishop of San Cristóbal, give a lively rallying-call on their behalf. He described how only ten per cent of substantial European Union aid had reached the Indian people in Mexico. After being *persona non grata* for his support of the Zapatistas, Don Samuel is now recognised as a mediator between them and the Government, and shrugged off threats to his life. Though Indians are oppressed 'from Alaska to Patagonia', he has a heartening faith that they will flourish in the long term.

Peter Ashcroft
Eastleigh, England

Buffalo Milk

I feel constrained to repudiate the letter entitled 'Milked' (**NI 279**). The only use for milk in Sri Lanka has been that from the buffalo which has traditionally been made into curd and eaten with palm sugar – a delicious and nutritious food. Cow's milk in the sense we know it in Europe has never been used and most rural people, so a World Health Organization nurse told me, do not associate the powder with a living animal but regard it as material which, if mixed with water, is good for their children and supplements mothers' milk.

There may be poverty in Sri Lanka but in respect of the nutrition of children there is very little of the ignorance suggested by your correspondent.

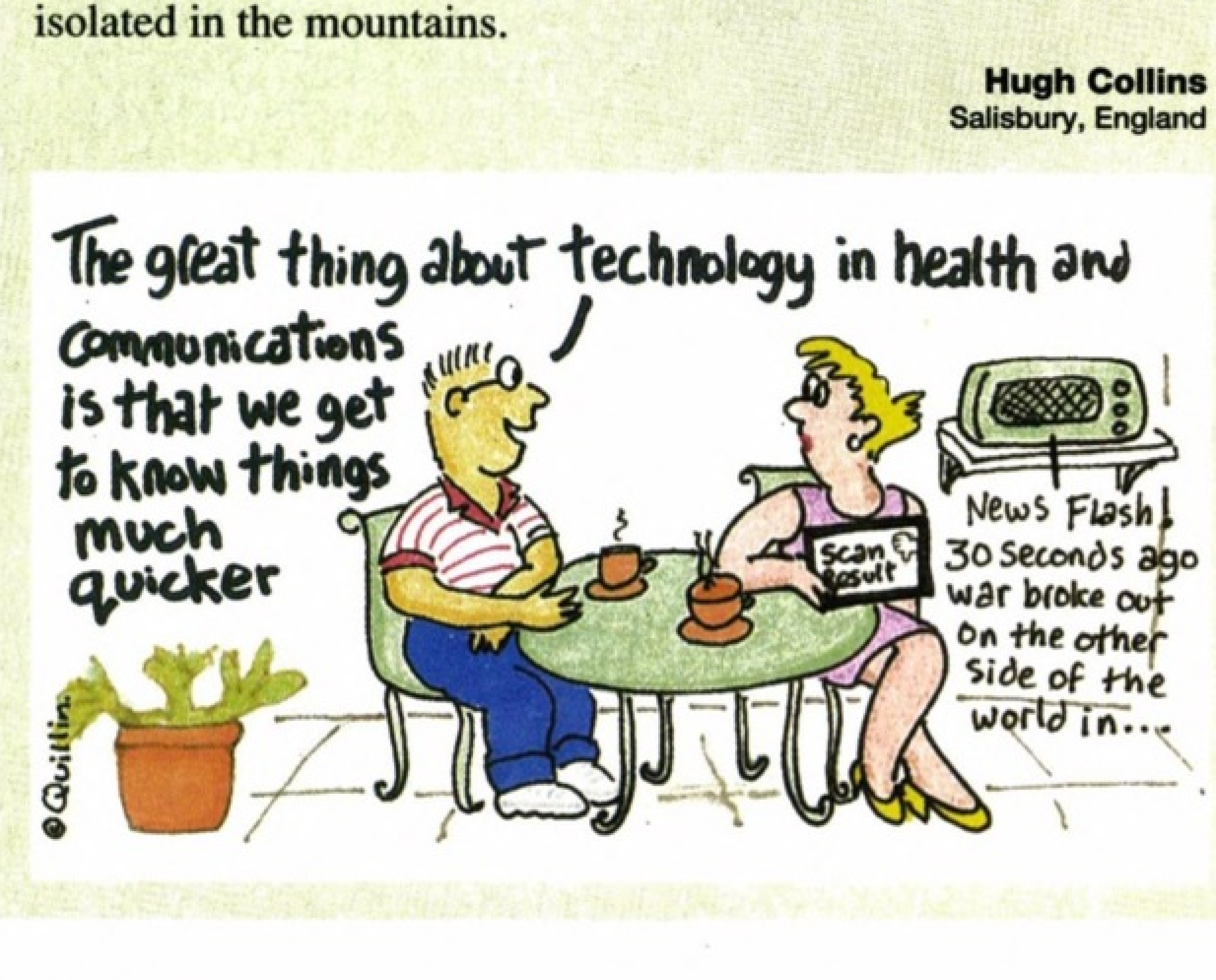
DJ Vickery
Boston, England

Green visions

There was little in your issue on ***Green Economics*** (**NI 278**) about technology. As the root of much damage and dispossession, technology is a thorny area in the debate on rethinking 'progress'. Many would actually or metaphorically smash computers and such-like in their urgency to reverse the dehumanizing effects of technological society. But what of its life-enhancing potential in health, education, communications etc? Much technology is vital in the struggle for human development, and access to it should be broadened.

I was disappointed to read Kirkpatrick Sale's reductive appraisal of the Industrial Revolution. While bemoaning the demise of traditional community life, he fails to acknowledge the new modern forms of community which function vigorously within and despite industrial society. It is crucial not to be blinded by dogma as we form a green vision. The **NI** loses its value as soon as conclusions are foregone and argument becomes monologic. Weighed down by our 'quirky baggage of bias' (Wayne Ellwood) we remain an excluded fringe group isolated in the mountains.

Hugh Collins
Salisbury, England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Cuba's reality

I read with disbelief and disappointment the *Country Profile* on Cuba, wondering whether James Ferguson had been to the same island I had left just two days earlier.

The disappointment was that many people who have not had the opportunity to visit Cuba, especially recently, might regard some of his statements as accurate and be encouraged that life was indeed 'picking up' instead of feeling angered by the continuing blockade and attitude of the US. Or sharing the Cubans' frustration at seeing their achievement being gradually diminished by lack of support.

Cuban-style *capitalismo* is the style of the very very few. The truth is that the majority cannot gather enough pesos to eat sufficient of their ration to stop feeling hungry. And that leaves nothing for soap to wash clothes, salt for food, oil to cook. Hard, hard choices have to be made. The reality for many Cubans is harsh and the belt is already pulled tight enough.

Cubans are very proud of their achievements and of helping other countries. But the young look at their parents and say: 'If this is the future, we don't want it.' The US-Helms-Burton Act now limiting investment in Cuba will be a deeply wounding body-blow to the country and the people, who were thinking that Clinton might just look at the blockade differently.

Hans Møsboek and Brenda Sandilands
Stubbekobing, Denmark

Nigerian minorities

I am disturbed to see the statement in your issue on ***Nation-states*** (**NI 277**), that 'some states – Malaysia, Nigeria, Belgium and Canada among them – are divided between two main ethnic groups'.

There are three major linguistic-ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), plus a large number of minority groups, of which the Ogoni (noted on your Facts) are only one. The total number of languages is over four hundred.

Most of these groups have strong feelings against economic and political domination by the major groups. The Ogoni have hit world headlines because the late Ken Saro-Wiwa sought international publicity for their case; previously all agitation by minorities (vocal, long-standing and ignored by the world community) was within the Nigerian system. The Nigerian Government perceives this as a threat, particularly because most of the oil and gas reserves upon which the Nigerian community depends are located in minority areas (not only Ogoniland).

Kay Williamson
Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Moral support

Thank you for publishing my piece on the detention of Nuhu Jafaru in your *Endpiece* (***Nation-states* NI 277**).

The response has been fantastic and reverberations also appear to have reached Cameroon. There is now talk of an 'out of court' agreement which, if it doesn't involve bribery, may alleviate the conflict, at least for the time being. The four Mbororo have gained a lot of moral support from all the letters sent to them.

Lucy Davis
Copenhagen, Denmark.

Childrens' view

I am 14 years old and really enjoy reading your magazine. It is very informative and engaging. Being a young person, I think it might be interesting to produce an issue of **NI** written by children.

We do have a lot of opinions on many topics, and adults are often surprised at the extent to which we take notice of, and care about, world issues. I think that it could be very enlightening for many adults to hear what young people around the world think. I'm sure lots of children would jump at the chance to write an article for **NI**; I know I would.

Geneva Melzack
Manchester, England

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the New Internationalist.

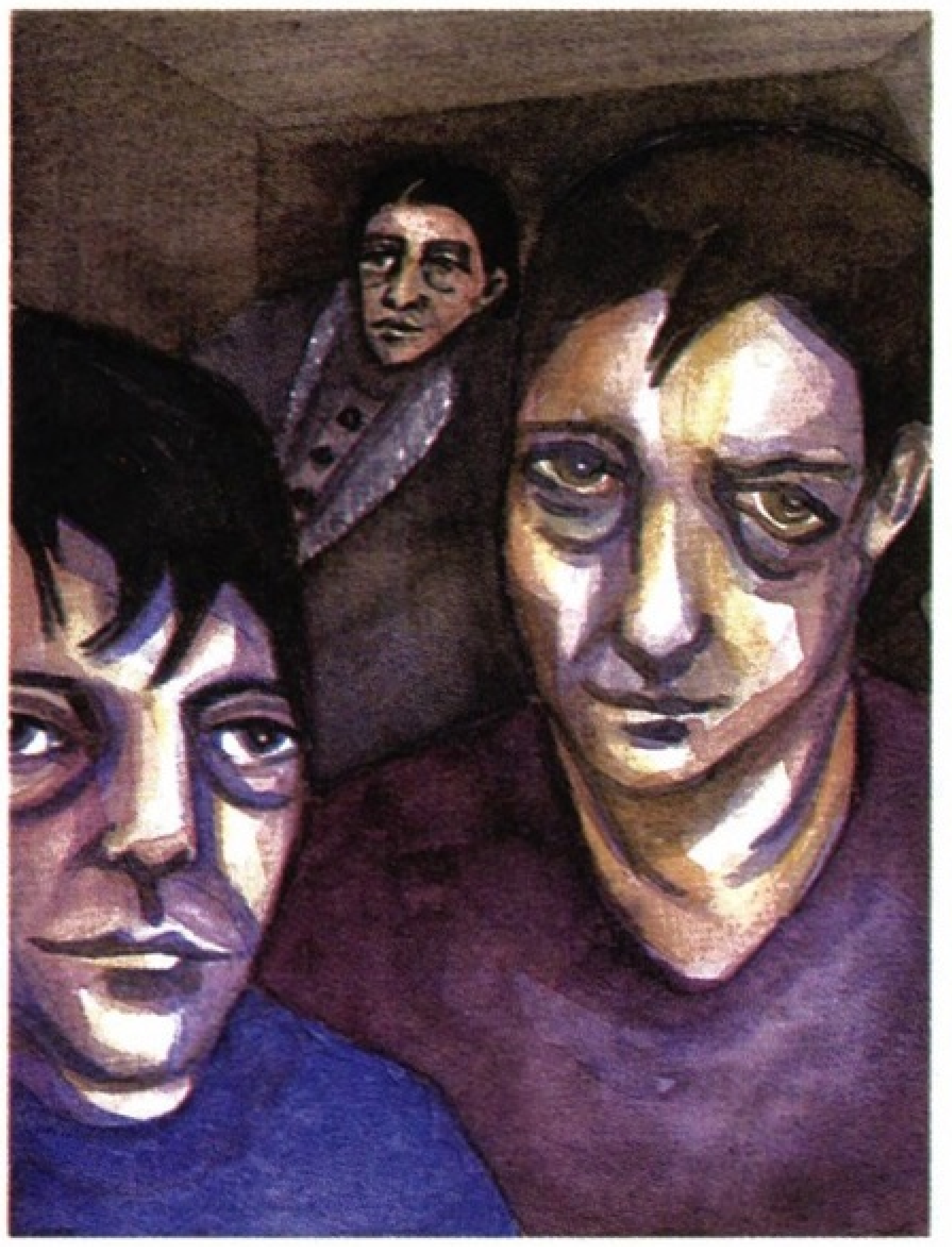
LETTER FROM CHECHNYA

The Lost Generation

Olivia Ward meets the children of Grozny amid the ruins of their town.

‘THERE IS NOTHING normal here, nothing reassuring,’ the young French doctor told me, rubbing sleep from eyes that had seen too many nights without it. In his Grozny office he was sitting with his laptop computer, trying to make sense of the research he had been doing on the traumas of Chechen children after nearly two years of war.

Before I could learn more, the 6.00pm curfew cut off our conversation – the time after which marauders roam the streets and Russian forces shoot without warning. No, we agreed, as we picked our way across the empty bomb-shattered street to our temporary home. There is nothing normal here.


MIRIAM McCURDY

I hardly needed expert evidence of childhood trauma. It was built into the lifestyle of war, in the way families lived in concentric circles around their homes as though confined by an invisible fence. The largest circle was for daytime, when cars heaved along the roadways, stall vendors blasted defiant Chechen music into the markets and people stood chatting in the open air. Then a smaller circle as the dreaded curfew approached and children were herded into their neighbourhoods. And finally the tight circle of the family hearth where doors were sealed and heavy wooden shutters bolted in an illusion of safety.

In Grozny, as in many towns and villages across Chechnya, every night was a new throw of the dice. Sharing this dim half-life I sat with ten-year-old Aslan and his teenage sisters Fatima and Hodi. Their mother, Ritta, exhausted from her day of hospital rounds, lay on the couch massaging her feet.

The television chattered away aimlessly, ignored. The noise was there to cover the crash of explosions and the staccato cough of machine guns that were battering the ruined city outside this artificial oasis.

Inside the airless room the children were not relaxing, but waiting, dark circles under their eyes. They had hardly slept since the latest gun battles and missile attacks had forced them to flee to a neighbour's cellar where they cowered in the dark, shrinking from the rustle of rats.

For too many days and nights they have witnessed this relentless violence and their parents' helplessness to defend them from it. The thin membrane of childhood has been torn away, leaving them open to the poisons of the world.

Five-year-old Arsen knows. After surviving two of the most horrifying attacks of the war in the doomed village of Samashki, he simply gave up speaking. What thoughts are bottled up behind those clouded gray eyes, I wondered as I sat in front of him in the dirt of the refugee settlement where he now lives.

But the questions were too large and the answers too despairing to bring to the surface. The child kept his terrible secrets, and his mother, going about her daily chores like a woman in a nightmare, waited discreetly until he was asleep to cry.

Tracing the lives of children in Chechnya was like descending through the levels of hell. Close to the bottom were children broken by physical as well as psychological wounds. Amina, her thin fingers wrapped around the hospital-bed railing in pain, sobbed almost absentmindedly, as if she had forgotten how to draw an ordinary breath. From her small pelvis a thicket of tubes sprouted, replacing the functions of organs torn apart by shrapnel.

In the primitive village hospital ward where 12-year-old Said was recovering, two room-mates in bloodstained T-shirts waved me away. Lying with his face to the wall, the slight youngster was rigid with shock and rage, his newly-amputated arm bound up just below the shoulder.

By the time they are 15, the doctor told me in a whisper, those boys will be dedicated fighters. If Chechnya does not win its independence from Russia, they will continue the struggle to the death. Beyond, to the next generation.

But their childhoods were already dead. I could read that in the burnt-out eyes and the strained mouths that knew only how to mimic a smile. It was the same for the others, younger and still able to play, if only to pass the time between attacks.

‘It isn't normal for parents to bury their children,’ muttered a woman outside the hospital as the bombing began again monotonously. Nearby, villagers moved their families into the cellars for one more night. All over this land without optimism, a lost generation was waiting and watching in the dark. ■

Olivia Ward is bureau chief for the *Toronto Star* in Moscow. She has just won Canada's National Newspaper Award for international reporting.

Update

RESISTANCE

Ploughshares Four

Personal disarmament at work

IN THE EARLY HOURS of Monday, 29 January 1996, three women snipped their way through the fence of the British Aerospace factory and test site in Warton, Lancashire. Soon after, they magically found themselves inside the south hangar, right in front of a Hawk jet destined for Indonesia, where it was to be used against the people of East Timor, who have suffered the loss of more than a third of their population since 1975. The women took out household hammers and blow by blow disabled all those components and devices that were connected to weaponry – like the nose cone, the radar, the bomb attachment under the wings and the control devices in the cockpit.

Lotta Kronlid, Andrea Needham and Joanna Wilson then hung up banners, poured seeds and ashes over the wings, put up photographs of children along with a video and a report from their group Seeds of Hope – East Timor Ploughshares. Over two hours later, after much singing, dancing in front of the security cameras and waving to a patrol that went past they finally phoned the British Press Association from within the hangar asking them to phone security at British Aerospace. Twenty minutes later they were arrested. Some days later Angie Zelter, the fourth Ploughshare, was arrested after publicly stating her intention to disarm a Hawk. All four women are currently on remand at Risley Prison charged with criminal damage and conspiracy to commit such damage to the tune of £2.4 million ($3.8 million). Their sentences could be anywhere between one and fifteen years.

Since their action other Ploughshares women have carried out support and campaigning work. The Ploughshares philosophy, which is not based on any particular religious doctrine, is about breaking through fears for personal safety and taking responsibility for actions. All actions are non-violent and 'challenge the sheep-like habit of doing as others do, of not stepping out of line, otherwise known as obedience'. The Seeds of Hope group has worked consciously to counter projections of heroism and martyrdom. These projections can at first give inspiration but are ultimately disempowering because they encourage belief that someone else – who has more courage, commitment, spiritual strength, and so on, *ad nauseam*, than ourselves – can act on our behalf. This is why the women who have carried out the post-action support work are considered to be an equal and essential part of the group, even though less publicly prominent.

At present the group is women only, though support from men is welcome, and future plans may include men more actively. ■

From information supplied by Rowan Tilly. Contact Seeds of Hope – East Timor Ploughshares at Box S, 55 Queen Margaret's Grove, London N1 4PZ, England. Tel/Fax: +44 (0)171 923 9511. E-mail: ricarda@gn.apc.org.

Oily clique

Equatorial Guinea will become the 'Kuwait of Africa', the country's government has promised, as Mobil Oil prepares to pump oil out of the local seabed. Far from filling the tiny country's coffers, critics argue, the wealth will probably accumulate around President Teodoro Obiang and his ruling clique. According to Victorino Bolekia Bonay, mayor of the capital, Malabo: 'They'll keep arresting and torturing people and seeing coup plots because all that money will make them even more paranoid.'

World Press Review, Vol 43 No 5

On the up

Virtual-reality methods are being used for psychiatric therapies dealing with problems as varied as sex offences, fear of heights and fear of flying. Pioneered by Professor Hans Sieburg of the University of California at San Diego, the greatest success of the virtual-reality treatments is with acrophobics (fear of heights). For them a virtual environment has been constructed which includes a virtual hotel with open elevators which takes the patients up 49 storeys with series of ever scarier balconies. After weeks of the treatment, most reported a dramatic drop in anxiety concerning height.

Down To Earth, Vol 4 No 23

No place like home

About 5,800 Japanese who had leprosy are still warehoused in leper colonies, even though most have been cured since the 1950s. Now they are gaining their freedom, but most will have no homes to go to as they will be shunned by their families. The head of Japan's patients' council summed up social attitudes thus: 'Having a leper in the family, even a cured leper, causes all kinds of problems – you don't get a promotion you were expecting, or a marriage engagement is broken off unexpectedly.'

World Press Review, Vol 43 No 5

SOREN RUD / ALFA / CAMERA PRESS

King of the bleachers: the ever-whiter Michael Jackson

Bleach ban

When The Gambia's National Intelligence Agency, acting on a tip-off, swooped on the head post office in the capital, Banjul, it was not for mail tampering, suspected sabotage or interference with government documents. No, the NIA was there to pick up three young women for skin bleaching. One has been fined nearly $500 with the alternative of a year's imprisonment with hard labour.

In December of last year, Captain Yahya Jammeh, chairman of the military junta, signed the Skin Bleaching (prohibition) Decree 1995, one of more than 70 decrees introduced since it took control in July 1994 and suspended the old constitution.

Skin-bleaching creams which can permanently damage skin are a problem in other African nations too. But the logic of putting women in prison for their use seems a mite too single-minded. Women bleach mainly because of social perceptions that lighter skins are more attractive. The fine for selling or importing the creams is up to $2,000.

Rosemary Long/Gemini

Painful at the top

A unique study by US researchers has tested stress levels across several species of wild animals – mongooses, wild dogs and baboons among them – to come up with the surprising finding that dominant animals are the most stressed and suffer problems

like miscarriages and shortened life-spans. The study is the first of its kind to test animals in the wild. Previous studies with captive animals had led to the theory that subordinate animals had higher chronic stress levels. But now it seems being top dog is not the healthiest of options.

Down To Earth, Vol 4 No 22

Stalemate

The UN Human Rights Commission admits to being 'stupefied' at the extent of CIA activity aimed at discrediting Haitian President Aristide.

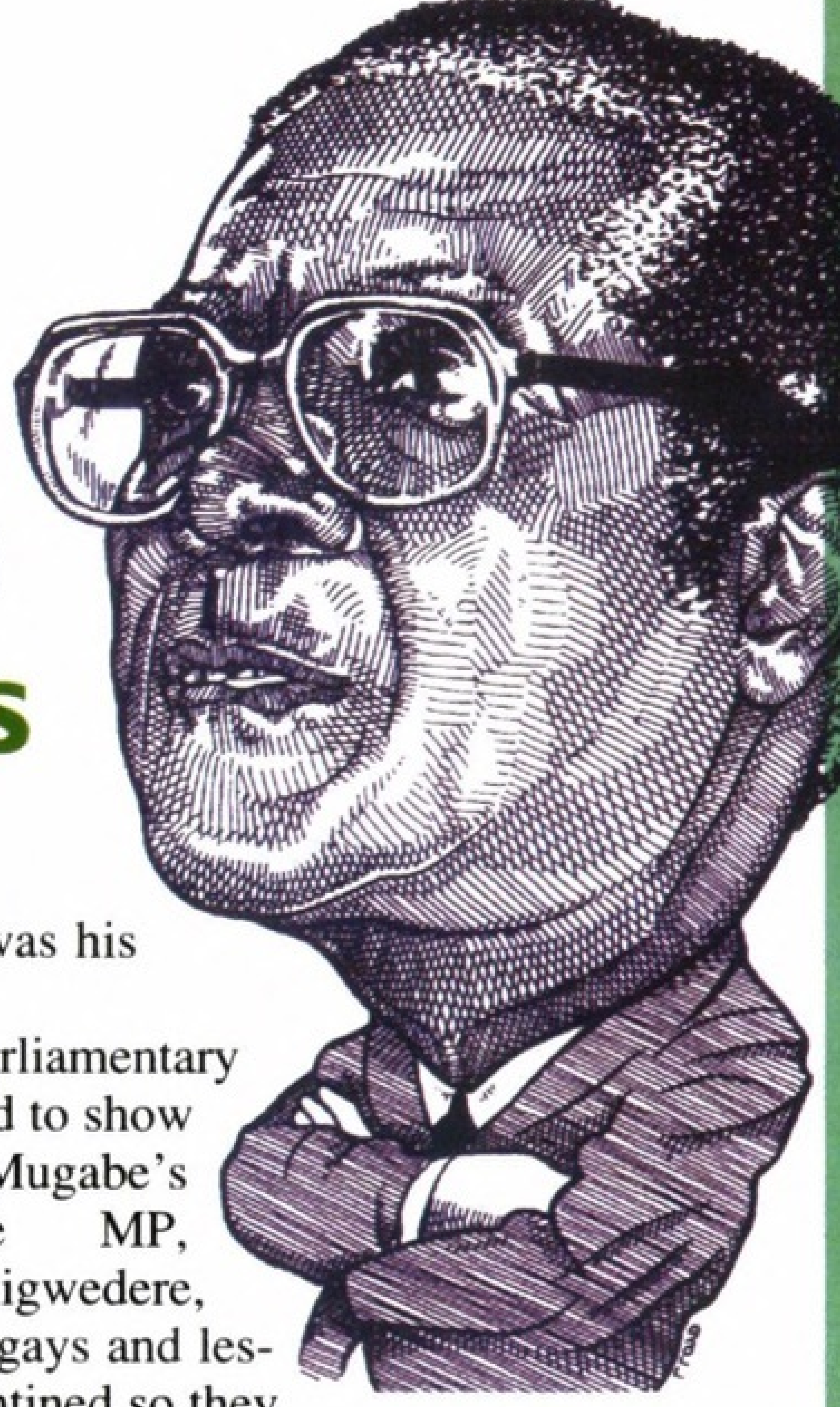
It has demanded 150,000 pages of documents seized by the US Army, but the US won't return them without blacking out the names of all US citizens. Furthermore, it wants the Haitian Government to sign an eight-point memorandum promising that information from the documents won't be made public or released in a manner which would cause repercussions. It also specifies restrictions on access and that 'records will be maintained of the individuals who have access'. The Haitian Government is resisting such arm-twisting by refusing to sign.

Red Pepper, No 24

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mugabe hounds gays

Zimbabwe's President acts unnaturally



When Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe was returned to office for another six years in March, the country's few remaining dissidents heaved a collective groan of despair. His party was the only one in the election and only 30 per cent of voters bothered to turn up to vote for it.

Mugabe has become more autocratic and paranoid with age. He has accused opposition leaders of plotting to assassinate him and foreign governments of plotting to dethrone him. But his most publicized attack yet has been directed at gays.

It all began at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair last July, when the Gay and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) attempted to hold a gay-rights exhibit. Calling homosexuals 'sodomists' [sic] and 'sexual perverts', Mugabe banned the exhibit. The book fair theme was human rights.

Despite drawing criticism from many participants at the fair, including Wole Soyinka and Nadine Gordimer, Mugabe continued his vituperation. At a Heroes Day Rally in Harare a few days later, he said: 'If dogs and pigs don't do it, why must human beings? Can human beings be human beings if they do worse than pigs?'

Over the next few months Mugabe was the target of much derision on his visits abroad. He received a letter of protest from 70 members of the US Congress accusing him of bigotry. In London, South Africa and the Netherlands he was greeted by placard-wielding gay and human-rights activists. 'They can demonstrate, but if they come here [to Zimbabwe] we will throw them in jail,' was his reaction.

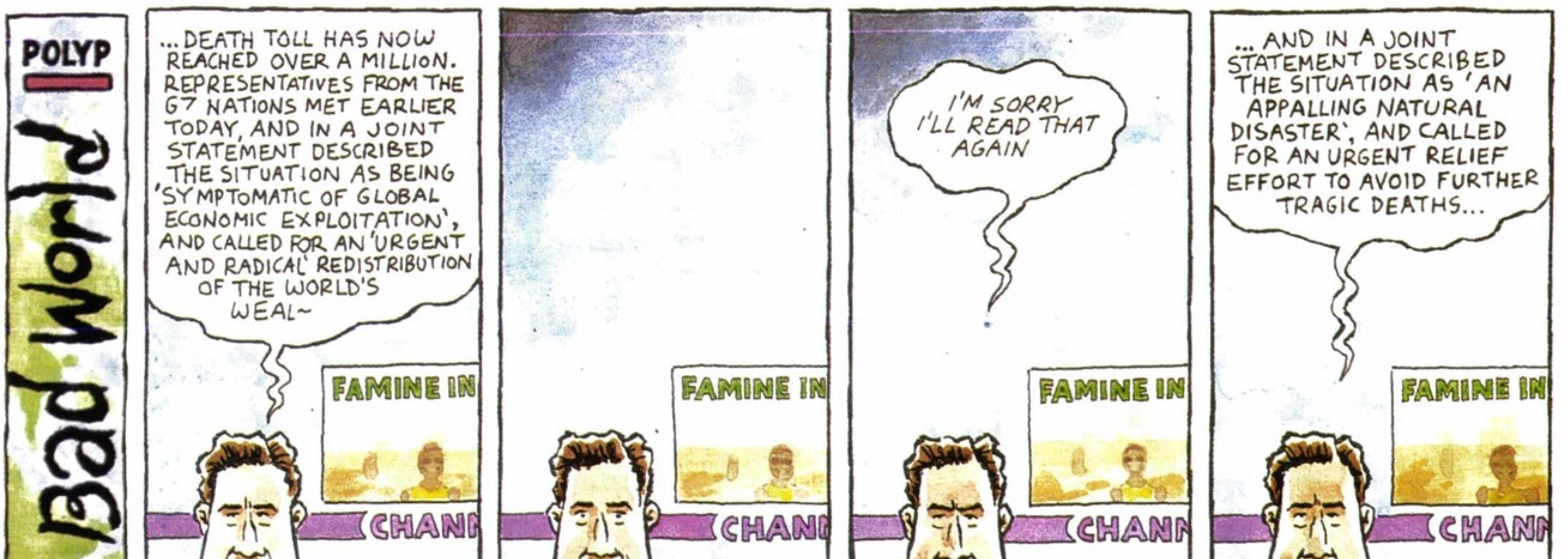
During a parliamentary debate designed to show support for Mugabe's attacks, one MP, Aeneas Chigwedere, suggested that gays and lesbians be quarantined so they could not 'infect' the rest of the nation.

GALZ is a tiny organization and far from militant. After Mugabe's attack, many left its ranks out of fear. Its records have been moved to a secret location, and little remains of the organization other than a post box number. But others have stuck with it and become more vocal, notably a number of black members. Most refuse to speak to the media for fear of persecution.

Prior to the July attack, gay Zimbabweans led relatively undisturbed lives. There were a couple of gay clubs in Harare and, though 'unnatural sex acts' are illegal, gays were not unduly harassed. Today, most gays are keeping a low profile.

Mugabe was widely criticized for his homophobic stance, but mostly by foreigners. A lot of Zimbabweans feel that he took a popular stance which he knew would win him domestic support – like most Africans, they see marriage and procreation as central to life. Failure to fulfil these requirements often leads to stigmatization. Mugabe is also aware that homosexuality is seen as a 'Western disease'. ■

Nico Zaverdinos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Update

Baby talk

Reassuring news for parents and carers who wonder how much talking to their babies affects them. US psychologists Marie Balaban and Sandra Waxman believe that infants use words to help them make sense of the world well before they can speak. They gave 44 babies a series of animal toys to play with. While one group were given five cat toys which were identified as such verbally by the researchers, another group received the toys without being told they were cats. The next step of the experiment involved giving the babies two new toys: a cat and a bear. The first group that had been told they were playing with cats spent significantly less time on the cat and focused on the bear, while the second group spent equal time with both new toys. The researchers think the babies who did not hear the cats being identified by a word had not noticed that the toys had things in common, whereas babies who heard the labels picked out similarities.

New Scientist, Vol 150, No 2027

BIOTECHNOLOGY

Cell piracy

Protest against genetic patents

SCIENTISTS HAVE BEEN COLLECTING BLOOD, tissue and hair samples from indigenous peoples around the world as part of the Human Genome Diversity Project (HGDP). The Project is a US-funded effort to catalogue and store the DNA of 'disappearing' indigenous populations for future study and to reconstruct the history of the world's populations.

But to critics like Debra Harry this neutral-sounding science is a thin smokescreen for 'bio-piracy'. A member of the Northern Paiute nation in Nevada, Harry is part of a global coalition outraged by the Project's potential for manipulating and commercializing life-forms. Once blood samples are immortalized in gene banks, unlimited amounts of DNA (the chemical compound which carries the genetic imprint of each human) can be generated and made available for almost any research. Harry asserts this is colonialism at the molecular level: 'They've taken our land and water. Now they want to mine our genetic resources.'

SURVIVAL INTERNATIONAL

Already three patents from the cell lines of indigenous peoples have been filed. One from the cell line of a 26-year-old Guayami woman from Panama was withdrawn in 1993 after a wave of international protest. However, the US Government refused to return the genetic samples to the Solomon Islands, arguing that the source of samples is irrelevant under current patent law.

In March last year the US Department of Health patented the DNA of a man from the Hagahai nation in Papua New Guinea. Washington now claims exclusive property rights over 'inventions' derived from Hagahai cell lines over the next 20 years.

Debra Harry fears that native groups will be easily coerced into exchanging their blood for one-off medical services or cash. She is also concerned that the project's 'open access' research policy will allow giant pharmaceutical companies to make a fortune by developing new drugs from such genetic material. Activists argue that the full implications of genetically altered life forms released into the environment cannot possibly be known. ■

Fiona Muldrew

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ROGER GRACE / EPL

Life out of death: the hulk of the sunk Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior*.

Neither fish nor foul

Dumping at sea has always been controversial, but if we dump the right kinds of things, then sea life can actually be advanced. In the US, cleaned-up rigs and tanks have helped transform a barren seabed of sand and mud into a thriving habitat. For like sunken ships – the world's first large artificial reefs – the metal provides a smooth hard surface for coral larvae to settle on and offers shelter from predators and breeding sites for fish and invertebrates. In Japan, some five to ten per cent of its coastal seabed is enhanced by carefully designed and expensive concrete, steel and other structures, heavily subsidized by the Government.

***The Geographical Magazine*, Vol LXVIII No 5**

Freedom rocks

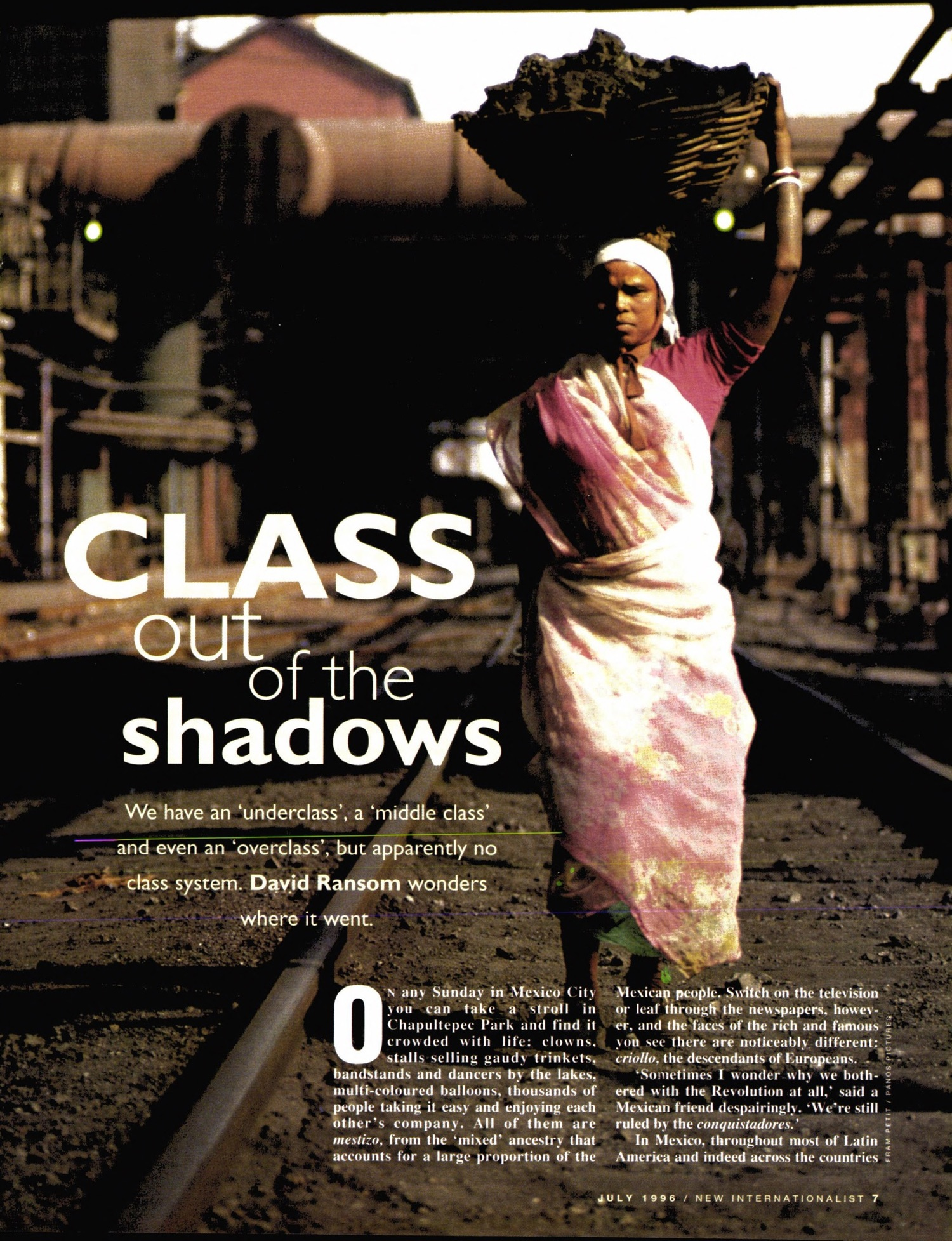
Six former Robben Island political prisoners are breaking chunks of rock brought from the quarry on the island in an effort to raise money for others like them in South Africa who face hardships due to unemployment. Whereas some former political prisoners have found government jobs and now lead comfortable lives, others have not been so lucky. The rocks are being broken down to the size of tennis balls and neatly packaged in a box bearing a colour picture of President Mandela (the most famous of those incarcerated on Robben Island) and a certificate of authenticity. They are selling like hot cakes in tourist shops and the aim is to raise over half-a-million dollars. According to Ahmed Kathrada, a stalwart of the African National Congress: 'The rock was chosen because the work at the quarry was the method the authorities used in pursuit of their efforts to crush our spirits – they said so in as many words. The quarry was the only place we could communicate. There we conducted our political and academic classes and had our leadership meetings. It became a very important place in our lives at Robben Island.'

Mohammad Allie/Gemini

Quote

'Those who live in a palace do not think about the same things, nor in the same way, as those who live in a hut.'

Thomas Sankara, murdered former president of Burkina Faso, quoting Karl Marx in justification of his decision to live in a modest house.



FRAM PETIT / PANOS PICTURES

CLASS out of the shadows

We have an 'underclass', a 'middle class' and even an 'overclass', but apparently no class system. **David Ransom** wonders where it went.

On any Sunday in Mexico City you can take a stroll in Chapultepec Park and find it crowded with life: clowns, stalls selling gaudy trinkets, bandstands and dancers by the lakes, multi-coloured balloons, thousands of people taking it easy and enjoying each other's company. All of them are *mestizo,* from the 'mixed' ancestry that accounts for a large proportion of the Mexican people. Switch on the television or leaf through the newspapers, however, and the faces of the rich and famous you see there are noticeably different: *criollo,* the descendants of Europeans.

'Sometimes I wonder why we bothered with the Revolution at all,' said a Mexican friend despairingly. 'We're still ruled by the *conquistadores.*'

In Mexico, throughout most of Latin America and indeed across the countries of the Majority World, it is impossible to ignore the visible evidence of a class system at work, separating small and immensely powerful élites from the great majority of the people.

In the Minority World – the rich industrial countries of the North – on the other hand we have lived for a couple of generations at least with the general idea that class is a thing of the past. Among the chattering classes it hardly gets a reference, unless someone happens to mention it in passing or by mistake. Our images of it are antique, sepia-tinted: male, downtrodden masses toiling away with hot metal in gigantic factories and a cloud of smog; bloated capitalists counting their cash in stately piles. The class system has simply evaporated, according to this theory. Life for the majority has changed beyond recognition, improved beyond measure. We are all middle class now.

Class divisions are created at the top, where there is a vested interest in keeping as quiet as possible about them

But hang on a minute. It is worth remembering that class divisions are created at the top, where there is a vested interest in keeping as quiet as possible about them, at least in public. And consider the implications of the following story – it comes from the United States, but could equally have come from almost anywhere in the world:

'On 25 February 1991 the compensation committee of the board of directors of General Dynamics met to consider revising the compensation package of its chief executive officer, William Anders, and 24 other top executives. Under the plan they approved, the executives would receive a bonus equal to their yearly salary if General Dynamics stock rose ten points, from $25.56 per share to $35.56 per share, and stayed there for ten days. If the stock went up another ten points to $45.56 per share and stayed *there* for ten days, they would receive a bonus equal to twice their yearly salary, and so on until the plan expired in 1994...

'So what do you suppose that Mr Anders and those other executives did? They announced a massive layoff of more than 12,000 of the company's 86,000 employees, cut spending in other areas and froze the salaries of anyone below their ranks. By the end of the year, they had amassed $600 million in cash, which they promised to spread among the shareholders, and earned themselves $18 million in bonuses as the stock price held to the $45.56 mark for the tenth day. Anders personally received more than $9 million in salary and bonuses.'[1]

Mr Anders and his kind have congealed into what has come to be called in North America an 'overclass': immensely wealthy corporate executives and the 'interests' of capital they represent. Twenty years ago, the chief executive officers of large companies in the US were paid about 35 times more than the average worker they employed; today the ratio is 187 times as much.[2] By 1989 the top ten per cent of Americans controlled 80 per cent of the country's financial assets; the wealthiest 0.5 per cent of families (some 400,000 people) could have paid off the entire US national debt and still have been worth ten per cent more than they were in 1983.[3]

Underclass

This – the rich getting richer – is familiar fare. But the statistics tell a story that is about more than money. In effect, each of the 24 board members of General Dynamics pocketed the wages, the self-respect and the aspirations of 500 employees. Their ability to do this, and to get away with it, presupposes the existence of a whole structure which empowers one small group of people to do this to another much larger group of people – and eventually to cast out upwards of 30 million people into an 'underclass' beyond the outer parameters of the American Dream.

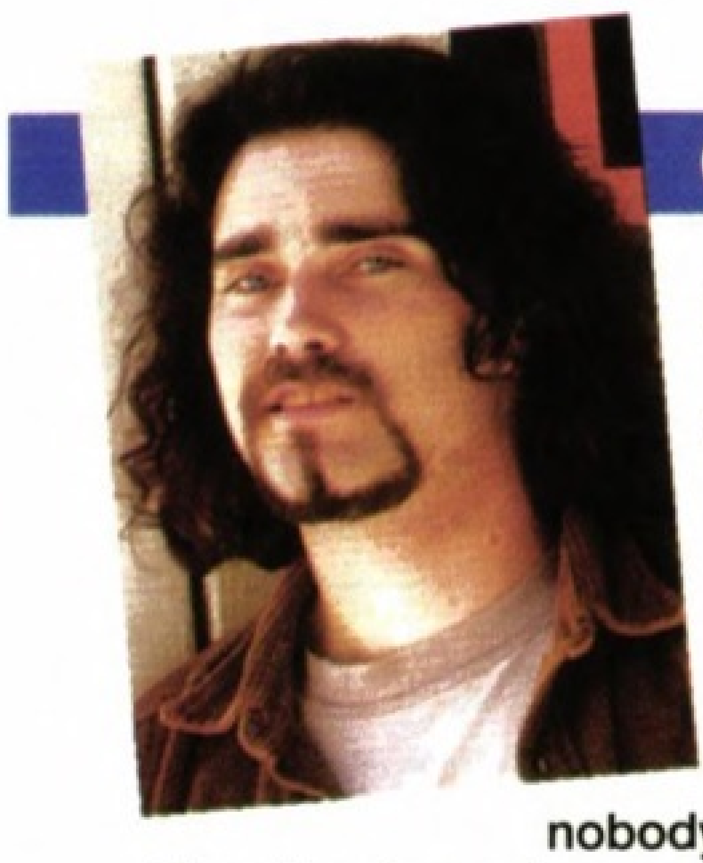
Class is about this kind of power over people. It is about ownership, control and exclusion, and about the way in which human aspiration is wasted and belittled.

The evidence for the persistence of class divisions in the North is, in fact, quite compelling. International research conducted

Gold rush turned sour on the streets of California: 30 million cast out of the American Dream and into the 'underclass' in the United States.

WORK
FOR
FOOD

S RUBIN / J B PICTURES / NETWORK



CLASS OF '96 – AUSTRALIA

UNHELPFUL MYTH

Jeremy is 23. His parents migrated from Britain 20 years ago. He is a social researcher, with strong interests in politics and history.

MAINTAINING THE MYTH THAT AUSTRALIA IS EGALITARIAN is probably the least helpful thing we do for our society. When people think that everything's fair and evenly distributed, then nobody's willing to do anything to correct the imbalances.

There's a large degree of social mobility in Australia and this means, for example, that many poorer migrants can earn reasonable money and eventually buy their own homes. But this social mobility shouldn't be confused with a lack of class divisions.

I think the concept of class helps to focus our attention on a form of discrimination that, unlike sexism and racism, isn't blatantly obvious. This is especially so in Australia, where people's class can't really be identified. People don't have class-based accents. Yet there is more obvious class discrimination in the area of education, with employers giving preferences to those benefiting from selective schooling. And also when people who live in poorer suburbs find that a hindrance to getting work. But generally, most people here are unaware of it. They all see themselves as being middle class.

The problem is that it's fed into people's brains that if they can't get a job it's their own fault. That's the dominant ideology. Whatever you have now, you've earned it. A lot of people who proudly say they've built up their own businesses from scratch have done so with capital they've been lent or given by their family. People who aren't in that position look at these people and think: 'I must be hopeless, lazy or have no talent.'

Also, in Australia, class and race are closely linked, especially for Aborigines. The way they are treated shows fairly clearly the existence of an underclass here.

But the problem with concepts like class is that society's more complex than the traditional divisions of ruling, middle and working class. Some of the lowest-paid people in society are in the service industries, those in childcare, shop assistants. Most are women, the worse-off being single mothers. They're part-time workers, and are often the most exploited people.

Interview by **George Fisher**

over a long period has now demonstrated beyond dispute that the patterns of mobility up and down the social scale (and no-one denies the existence of a scale of some sort) in these countries have remained basically the same throughout most of this *century*. The patterns are remarkably similar, too, from one country to the next, including the US, Japan and Germany, which – unlike 'class-ridden' Britain – are often thought of as 'open' societies. In Germany, for example, you are 5.39 times more likely to stay in the top-earning 'salariat' – and avoid moving down into the working class – if you are born into it, compared with the reverse for someone born into the working class. In Britain the figure is 5.48 times; in the US it is 3.72 times.[4]

One consequence of this is that the much-hyped 'equality of opportunity' in rich countries, the idea that all of us are free to 'succeed' regardless of our class origin, is illusory. The inequity of birth, inheritance and class still prevail.

All the same, what has happened to the working class in the North? Traditionally employed in manufacturing industries which have now largely disappeared from our shores, the working class has been displaced into the service sector. But somebody must be *making* things, somewhere.

Indeed they are: 80 per cent of the world's manufacturing workforce is now to be found in the South, particularly in a belt around the tropics that was once best known for its rainforests.[5] Millions of people – most of them women – in Latin America, Asia and the Indian sub-continent, work in factories that make the electrical goods we buy, the clothes we wear, the shoes we walk in, the toys we play with. The conditions in which they work, and the rewards they receive for doing so, are little different from those in the industrial countries of the North one hundred years ago.

When you endure or witness these conditions at first hand – as I have witnessed them in Mexico – there is only one word that can accurately describe the experience: exploitation. Such conditions could only have been devised *for* people who have no choice in the matter, and *by* people who have lost any sense of common humanity, though they exercise great power over others nonetheless.

Chameleon

The existence of this kind of exploitation completes the picture of a fully-fledged class system at work. To see this picture clearly all we have to do is to think of the earth as one place and take an international view.

Why should we take any other? We know well enough that capitalism went global some time ago, but perhaps we have still to catch up with the full implications, the dramatic impact this has had on all our lives. There is not so much a 'growing divide' or 'deeper gulf' between rich and poor *countries*, as a higher wall between *classes* in all countries everywhere. Dramatic changes in appearance do not alter the nature of a chameleon: capitalism and class go together like profit and loss.

Class hasn't ceased to matter simply because communism failed. Quite the reverse. In formerly communist countries a class system persisted beneath a veneer of equality, so that commissars have transformed themselves into entrepreneurs and scarcely noticed the difference. In Hungary a destitute underclass has its ancestry in exclusion under the communist regime prior to 1989.[6] The legal minimum wage in Hungary now provides for no more than 64 per cent of basic subsistence needs – in Russia for just 20 per cent. In Bulgaria the value of the real minimum wage was halved in 1991; by mid-1992 three-quarters of Bulgarian households had incomes below the social minimum.[7]

In the brand-new industrializing 'tigers' of Asia, too, an old-fashioned class system is duly emerging. In China, 50,000 people a day visit McDonald's in Beijing and spend the equivalent of two weeks' wages for an average Chinese worker on a single burger. In South Korea an immensely wealthy management élite hacks its way around the fairways of privilege at exclusive golf clubs that can cost upwards of $200,000 to join. In Malaysia a class of NQTs – 'Not Quite Theres' – has been characterized as 'halfway up the ladder of success... introverted, spending-oriented, neurotic, unadventurous, traditional and lacking in confidence'.[8]

The idea that 'we are all middle class now' (a middle with no top or bottom) is plainly ridiculous. All the arguments advanced to promote it eventually turn to nothing. For example, because half the shares on the London Stock Exchange are now owned by pension funds and insurance companies[9] it is suggested that there is a form of 'popular capitalism' in Britain. But who owns the insurance companies? And which pensioners have the right to tell their pension funds what to do with the money? The middle class may search for a location somewhere between servant of the system and lord of the universe, but like any pig in the middle it tends to get dizzy.

There is not so much a 'growing divide' between rich and poor countries as a higher wall between classes

The 'hidden hand' of market forces has reached into the farthest corners of the earth and touched every one of us, marking us with our class, our part in the performance. To be honest, I could sit for ever in

CLASS OF '96 – CANADA

CLASSICAL JAZZ

Elsa Pang is 19 and was born in Canada to working-class parents who emigrated from Hong Kong to Vancouver. Right now she's working as a carpenter, building a pavilion for a community garden in Vancouver. She's just got a scholarship to study media arts at Capilano College.

IN A LOT OF WAYS YOUR EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND REFLECTS YOUR CLASS. Obviously if someone's parents can't afford to send them to private school, then they're not considered to be as 'educated' as someone who has money.

Generally, upper-class people have better educations. It's reflected in high-school life. There are differences even in the school system in Vancouver. On the west side the schools have all the equipment, all the facilities, and they focus more on academic subjects. On the east side they focus on trades, on hairdressing and things like that, on getting you ready for the working world. On the west side, it's to prep you for university.

When I think of 'middle class' I think of consumers, of the consumerist attitude. They're people who have things. Young middle-class people have the privilege of going to university – maybe they don't want to go, but they have the financial ability to do it. There are other people I know who have the intellect, but they don't have the financial support.

I'm not living with my family. I'm making money and I'm living on my own. I don't feel like I'm poor, but I don't feel like I'm rich either.

I play classical piano. One thing about playing piano is that you have to go to recitals. I was very uncomfortable at these functions, partly because I don't like to dress up. I can't play properly dressed up. And the people, I could tell they thought that I wasn't worthy of their attention. They were a mixture of people, but you have to have enough money just to be able to play classical piano, to pay for your lessons. My mom worked really hard to pay for my lessons.

One time I had a piano competition and my mom couldn't come because she had to work. So I went to the competition alone and I was dressed in pants and a shirt, and they told me I had to go home to change. I had to take a taxi. Otherwise, the judges would have automatically deducted marks because of the way I was dressed, which doesn't reflect on my playing at all. I felt most aware of these kinds of class differences when I was playing classical piano. It was for people who wanted to be upper-class, even when they weren't.

Jazz wasn't for those people at all.

Interview by **Ross Crockford**

the depths of the Amazon rainforest watching a rubber-tapper in a long green robe singing plaintive songs and performing rituals with hallucinogenic *hayauasca,* without my getting any clearer idea of what on earth he was up to. Set us talking about rubber, however, and before long – even without mentioning glamour – we'd share a pretty good notion of our general drift.

Big-shot barons

Chances are that at the same time as this conversation, somewhere in the skies above our heads, big-shot rubber barons and their multinational chums would be winging their way between Sheraton Hotels talking with just as much facility across cultural boundaries about the very same thing.

Our two conversations would, however, be entirely different: the one about how to strengthen the hand of the rubber-tappers against the grip of the barons; the other about how to grab their rubber for as little as possible and turn the rainforest into real estate.

There's no middle ground here, and no way for one side to ignore the other. These are the active ingredients that decide, day by day, whether the rainforest will survive; whether the environment, genders, races and indigenous peoples will prosper or live in subjection. All too often it is still the barons, and subjection, that win. There are sides and sooner or later we all have to decide which one we are on.

Confronted with the class system we have a limited number of options open to us. We can continue to deny that it exists. We can ignore it. We can think of it as a natural feature of the human landscape. We can try to scale it. We can denounce it. Or we can look to each other in solidarity and decide to do something about it. We may be up against a dictatorship more subtle, impersonal and absolute than anything previously conceived, but once we have decided to act it is wonderfully liberating to discover what might then be created.

As consumers we can discover the people who produce what we consume; we can refuse to embrace the process of exploitation; we can seek out and promote those products that challenge it best and restrain the craving for blind consumption.

As producers and workers we can look to each other in a spirit of co-operation and solidarity, in place of competition, fear and hatred – competition is for games, co-operation is for real on a lonely planet. We can push forward the long, slow process of building links across international boundaries between labour unions and activist organizations. We can transform the function of work from the systematic destruction of human talent into the celebration of human dignity and ingenuity.

As citizens we can construct forms of government that express these needs rather than enforce the rule of free-market capitalism – *it* doesn't need democracy, but we do. We are many; they are few.

The seed of dissent holds the bloom of a new season. ■

Unbroken succession: customers at McDonald's in Moscow inherit the crown of the Communist commissars.

MARTIN PARR / MAGNUM

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1 Alan Downs, *Corporate executions*, American Management Association, New York, 1995. **2** *The Nation*, 8 April 1996. **3** Democratic Policy Committee Staff Report, *Who is downsizing the American Dream?*, Washington, 1 March 1996. **4** Gordon Marshall and Alan Swift, 'Social mobility – plus ça change' in *Prospect*, November 1995. **5** *World Development Report 1995*, The World Bank, Washington. **6** Julia Szalai, 'Why the poor are poor in post-1989 Hungary', paper prepared for the **NI**, Budapest, May 1996. **7** International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, *The global market – trade unionism's greatest challenge*, Brussels, 1996. **8** Richard Robinson and David SG Goodman (eds), *The new rich in Asia*, Routledge, London, 1996. **9** *Share Ownership*, HMSO, London, 1995.

THOMAS HOPKER / MAGNUM

CLASS

THE AMERICAN DREAM

Death of the middle class

The ideal that once defined how Americans lived and dreamed has gone. **John Cassidy** looks at what has replaced it.

William J McDonough, the President of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, watches his words as closely as a Savile Row tailor watches his stitches, and with good reason. Any mis-statement on his part, or even an intentional but slight deviation from the previous official line, can send the financial markets into a multi-billion-dollar tizzy.

McDonough shuns press conferences, but in November 1994 he invited 35 academics, executives and journalists to a day-long conference at the New York Fed's headquarters in lower Manhattan. When they had assembled, some from as far away as Los Angeles and London, he addressed them as follows: 'I am very pleased that all of you are here today to discuss what I feel is a critical issue facing our country. The issue is, of course, the growing disparity in wages earned by different segments of our labor force. It is deeply troubling that during the 1980s the real wages of low-skilled workers in the United States have fallen sharply, both in absolute terms and relative to the wages of highly-skilled workers. These dramatic wage developments raise profound questions for the United States, issues of equity and social cohesion, issues that affect the very temperament of the country.'

For a pillar of capitalism like McDonough to express concern about low wages is surprising. For him to then question, as he did, whether America 'will be able to go forward together as a unified society' is virtually unprecedented.

Until recently, it was an empirical law of American economics that the majority of citizens, including virtually all those who considered themselves middle class, received steadily rising wages. In the three decades after the Second World War in particular, the American dream of moving to the suburbs, buying a house and even sending the kids to college was no mere election slogan. Home ownership soared and the living standards of the middle class – idealized in television sitcoms – were the envy of the world.

Today that image is as dated as the television shows it spawned. Falling wages and rising prices have transformed the home economics of tens of millions of Americans. The trend is best illustrated with the help of a mental experiment. Imagine lining up the entire population of the US in order of ascending income, with the poorest on the extreme left and the richest on the extreme right. The person smack in the center of the line – the meridian – would be, by definition, the most middle-class American alive.

Falling wages and rising prices have transformed the home economics of tens of millions of Americans

In September of 1979 this person was earning (in constant, inflation-adjusted dollars) $498 a week, or $24,700 a year. By 1995 he or she had suffered a wage cut of about a hundred dollars a month, or 4.6 per cent.

The citizens on the right of the income

JOHN GARRETT / CAMERA PRESS

line-up fared very differently. In 1979 the typical full-time worker in the top third of the income distribution was earning $890 a week, or $46,280 a year. By September of 1995 his or her pay-check had swelled to $960 a week, or $49,920 a year – an increase of 7.9 per cent.

The fortunate souls on the extreme right of the income line-up were doing best of all.

Taken together... recent trends suggest an unavoidable conclusion: America is no longer a middle-class country

In 1979 the richest five per cent of American families earned, on average, $137,482, according to Census Bureau data. By 1993 their income had risen to $177,518, an increase of $770 a week, or 29.1 per cent. The top one per cent of families have made spectacular gains. According to the Congressional Budget Office, between 1977 and 1989 their average income rose from $323,942 to $576,553 – a gain of $252,611, or 78 per cent.

The numbers prove what many Americans have suspected for a long time: living standards have fallen or stagnated for the majority, while a small minority have enjoyed a bonanza. Taken together, recent wage and income trends suggest an unavoidable conclusion: America is no longer a middle-class country; indeed, the term 'middle class' has lost its meaning.

Vague meaning

The idea that the United States is a middle-class country is at least as old as de Tocqueville ('The whole country seems to have melded into one middle class') and Matthew Arnold ('That which in England we call the Middle Classes is in America virtually the nation'). By the 1950s opinion polls showed that the vast majority of Americans referred to themselves as middle class, regardless of their income. Despite this consensus, the exact meaning of 'middle class' remained vague. In contrast to what it meant in Europe, it did not mean the bourgeoisie, who were clearly defined by Engels as 'the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labor'.

Few inhabitants of California's Orange County or New York's Suffolk County owned factories or speculated on Wall Street. Most were regular employees of major corporations like McDonnell Douglas, Grumman or Hughes Aircraft. If they didn't go to work they risked losing their livelihoods, their houses and their cars. They were, in fact, not middle class at all in the Marxian sense of the word. They were working class but, unlike similar people in Britain or Germany, they called themselves middle class.

Most commentators let them get away with the theoretical confusion, and it is easy to see why. From 1945 until 1973 – a period that economic historians now refer to as the Golden Era – the American economy resolutely refused to conform to the pattern predicted by the left-wing graybeards. Yes, the rich got richer, but almost everybody else got richer with them, and at roughly the same pace. The spoils of economic growth were divided remarkably evenly. Broadly speaking, all Americans' incomes doubled – secretaries', factory workers', bank executives'.

A chart that is particularly worth examining divides the nation's 68.5 million families into fifths, or quintiles, with the poorest fifth on the left and the richest on the right, and covers two periods: from 1947 to 1973 and from 1973 to 1993.

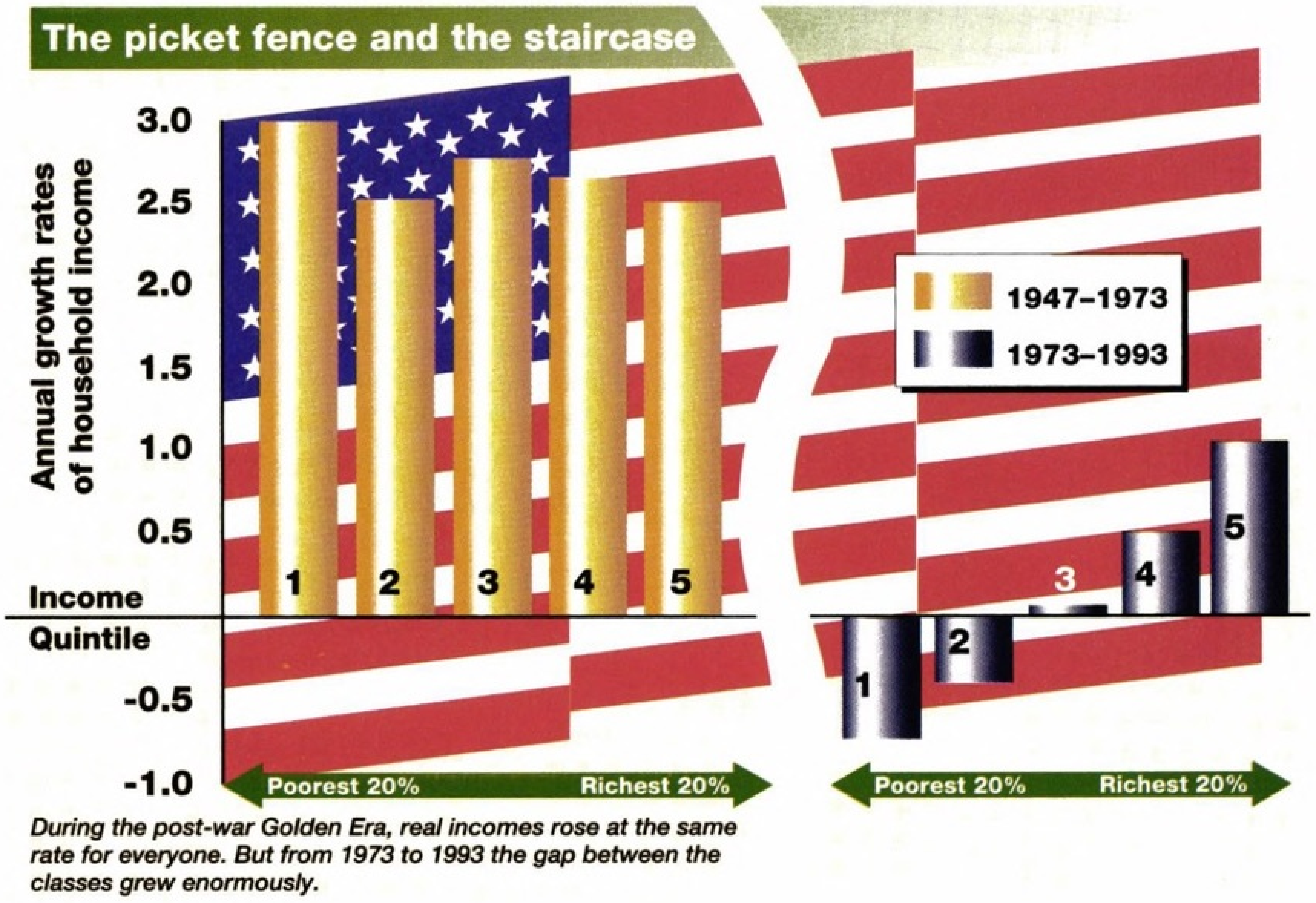
As Paul Krugman, an economist at Stamford University, has noted, the 1947-73 graph looks like a picket fence, which is entirely fitting: during the Golden Era income growth, like the picket fence, was an icon of middle-class America. The annual growth rate of family income was between 2.4 and 3.0 per cent, regardless of where the family stood in the income distribution.

A glance at the 1973-93 chart, however, shows that the picket fence has been replaced by a small staircase – and some of the steps are underground. The bottom two-fifths of American families saw their income fall, while the average family in the middle saw its income basically stagnate. Only the top 40 per cent enjoyed any income growth, and only the very rich enjoyed growth comparable with that of the Golden Era.

Some conservative economists have attempted to challenge these findings, but with little success. However the figures are shuffled, the basic picture remains the same: the staircase has replaced the picket fence and the country has experienced an unprecedented redistribution of income towards the rich.

The staircase graph and the changing distribution of income suggest that the country has now split into four groups. At the top there is an immensely wealthy élite, which has never had it so good. At the bottom there is an underclass which is increasingly divorced from the rest of society. And between these extremes there are, instead of a unified middle class, two distinct groups: an upper echelon of highly-skilled, highly-educated professionals who are doing very well; and a vast swathe of unskilled and semi-skilled workers who are experiencing falling wages, stagnant or declining living standards, and increased economic uncertainty. To label this group 'middle class' doesn't make sense. That phrase implies two things – rising living standards and a high degree of economic security – that no longer apply.

The dramatic rise in inequality has had one beneficial side effect: it has provided gainful employment for hundreds of economists who have been burrowing away in universities and research institutes



During the post-war Golden Era, real incomes rose at the same rate for everyone. But from 1973 to 1993 the gap between the classes grew enormously.

trying to solve the mystery of who killed the middle class. Sad to report, they have yet to come up with a single murderer.

One thing we do know is that the murder has nothing to do with taxation. This bit of knowledge will disappoint both conservatives who lay the blame for the middle-class squeeze on a growing tax burden, and liberals who link rising wealth concentration to regressive tax policies. But it is indisputable: the fact is that the rise in equality happened before the Internal Revenue Service got its hands on anybody's paycheck. And, contrary to popular myth, the over-all burden of taxation has remained remarkably constant. In 1973 federal taxes swallowed 19.5 per cent of the gross domestic product and in 1993 the figure was 19.9 per cent. It was the free market that decreed that most people's wages should fall or stagnate after 1973. And it was the free market that handed out pay bonanzas at the top of the income distribution.

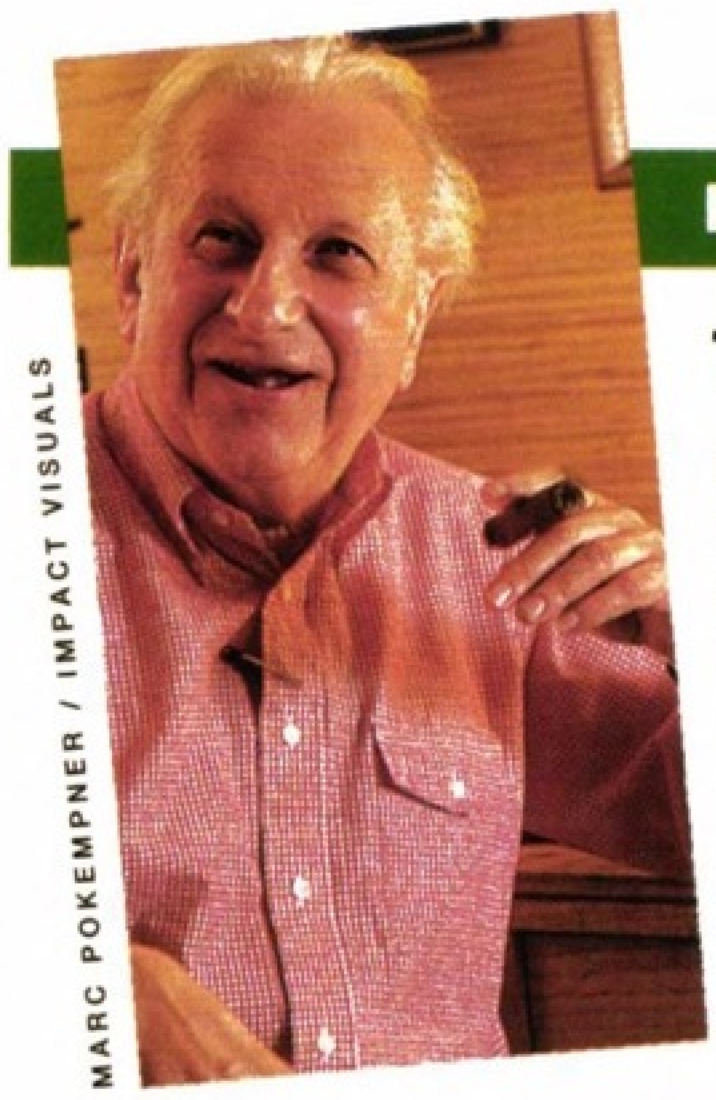
Anti-capitalism

Education, global competition, technological progress and the demise of the trade-union movement have all been identified as possible suspects – some of the factors probably interacted and reinforced each other. The rise of global competition may have encouraged managers to break unions and invest in computer technology. Similarly, the threat of corporate relocation and the growth of cheap immigrant labor may have contributed to the weakness of labor unions. But what nobody has yet explained satisfactorily is the explosion of incomes at the top of the distribution. The gap between the shop floor and the executive suite has turned into a chasm.

Labor Secretary Robert Reich, somebody who understands what is happening, says that the fallout from the decline of the middle class 'could be very divisive in this country'. He goes on: 'You end up pitting working American against working American, or against the poor, for portions of an ever-decreasing slice of the national pie.' The process is already visible in the rise of anti-immigration, anti-affirmative-action and anti-incumbency rhetoric. At least one Wall Street observer thinks he has spotted a new populist movement on the horizon: anti-capitalism. Stephen Roach, the chief economist at Morgan Stanley, told his clients in a circular that 'worker backlash could be one of the key issues of the 1996 presidential campaign'.

At some point politicians are going to have to level with the voters and tell them the truth: that the postwar Golden Era is gone forever, and the great middle class has gone with it.

© **John Cassidy** writes for *The New Yorker* magazine, where a longer version of this article originally appeared.



MARC POKEMPNER / IMPACT VISUALS

INTERVIEW WITH STUDS TERKEL

THE ANCIENT MARINER

STUDS TERKEL, now well into his eighties, has broadcast *The Studs Terkel Show,* a daily one-hour radio talk show in Chicago, for more than 40 years, and produced 10 classic books of oral history, including *Race*, for which he won a Pulitzer Prize. David Ransom spoke to him.

DR: I suppose people around the world still look to America as a kind of model; we have this idea of a go-getting, 'open' sort of a place with no class system, where anyone can make it if they just try hard enough.

ST: The United States never was a classless society, you know. It was a myth to begin with. For example, we never use the word 'working class'. Here's a case in point: a young girl whose father is a garbage collector, a sanitation man. I say to her: 'Your father is doing very important work. He's stopping plagues taking place, stopping diseases, terribly important work. Martin Luther King died for the garbage men of Memphis, you know.[1] You are a working-class family.'

She says to me: 'I *beg* your pardon! We're middle class.'

DR: Why are Americans so anxious to think they're all 'middle class'?

ST: I guess we're told that. At the end of World War Two the veterans that came back got a GI Bill of Rights. It gave them the right to buy a home or go to school, and for the first time millions went to college. But something new happened. The suburbs came into being, suburbs of GIs. They were given money to start homes. Before the War – and certainly before the Great Depression – the suburbs were where the rich people lived. Then along came a new kind of suburb, a blue-collar suburb. Now there are as many blue-collar suburbs in America as there are middle-class ones. So the young GI of working-class family starts thinking he's middle class. He's told that. And he buys things. He owns a home of his own, and people think as he does. And he's away from *them* – the blacks of course... The young, the new crop of Americans, have no sense of past. They've been deprived of it, and many are anti-union.

DR: How did that come about?

ST: Well, because of the elimination of history. So now the young pick up a newspaper, and there is no labor section. There's a business section, a sports section, an entertainment section – no-one thinks about labor, except when a picket takes a swing at a scab, when it's a news item. And so how would they know? They've been deprived of labor history. They don't know how the eight-hour day came into being.

I tell this tale of a young, up-scale couple waiting for a bus in Chicago, at the same place I do. We're there every day, and I can't get into conversation with them.

One day I say: 'Labor Day is coming up!' I knew that was the right thing to get them. They just turned away from me.

And I say: 'On Labor Day we march down the main streets of Chicago with banners flying, singing songs...'

And they say: 'We *loathe* the unions!'

Well, that was all I needed. I've become the Ancient Mariner now, you know, with a 'glittering eye', and I've got them pinned against the mail box, they can't get away.

And I ask him: 'How many hours a day do you work?'

He says: 'Eight.' He's caught unaware.

And I say: 'How come you don't work *eighteen* hours a day?'

And he's looking for escape and thinking this guy's nuts or something, and the girl is trembling, you know.

And I say: 'You know why you work eight hours instead of eighteen hours a day, as your great-grandparents did? Because some guys got hanged for you!' And I tell them about the Uprising, something that happened in 1886.[2]

And the bus is coming and I'm giving him this lecture. Finally he hops on the bus and gets away with this girl, and I never see them again. And to this day I think, in the mornings they look down at the bus stop from that very posh high-rise building, and he says to her: 'Is that old *nut* still down there?'

Well, it's a comic tale but it's basically true. How would this couple know about the eight-hour day? No-one's told them about it. There's no labor history they were ever taught. So they wouldn't know. All they do is read the business section of *The Wall Street Journal*, and they've become part of it.

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[1] Martin Luther King had gone to Memphis to lead a garbage-collectors' strike when he was assassinated in April 1968.

[2] On 1 May 1886 there were strikes across the US for an eight-hour working day. On 5 May an 'anarchist' bomb killed seven people in Chicago. The perpetrator was never found, but seven men were arrested and sentenced to death for 'incitement': one committed suicide, four were executed and the other two had their sentences commuted. These events were formative in marking 1st May as Labor Day around the world.

CLASS

QUESTIONNAIRE

Know YOUR place!

HOW ARE YOU COPING WITH THE CLASS STRUGGLE? ANSWER THE QUESTIONS AND ADD UP YOUR SCORE TO FIND OUT.

(Note: the currency is in US dollars: don't forget to convert roughly to your local currency where necessary)

1) WORK

It's not what you make, it's the way that you make it: how do earn your living?

[tick no more than two]

a) Benefits/welfare ☐
b) Monthly Salary ☐
c) Freelance/contracts ☐
d) Weekly Wage ☐
e) Piecework ☐
f) Dividends on shares ☐
g) Interest on deposits ☐
h) Rent ☐
i) Gambling ☐
j) Profits (self-employed) ☐
k) 'Black'/informal economy ☐
l) Commission ☐
m) Royalties ☐
n) Speculation (shares/property/ currency etc...) ☐
o) Begging ☐

2) EXPECTATIONS

How much do you expect your real annual earnings to increase/decrease over the next five years?

[tick one]

a) At least treble ☐
b) Double ☐
c) Increase by about a half ☐
d) Increase by about a third ☐
e) Increase by about a tenth ☐
f) Neither increase nor decrease ☐
g) Decrease ☐

3) CREDIT

What is the total limit of all the credit and charge cards that you can draw on?

[tick one]

a) More than $30,000 ☐
b) $20,001-$30,000 ☐
c) $10,001-$20,000 ☐
d) $5,001-$10,000 ☐
e) $2,501-$5,000 ☐
f) $1,001-$2,500 ☐
g) Up to $1,000 ☐
h) No credit or charge cards ☐

4) INHERITANCE

What is the value of money or property you have already inherited or expect to inherit?

[tick one]

a) More than $1,000,000 ☐
b) $500,001-$1,000,000 ☐
c) $250,001-$500,000 ☐
d) $100,001-$250,000 ☐
e) $50,001-$100,000 ☐
f) $5,001-$50,000 ☐
g) less than $5,000 ☐
h) nothing ☐

5) LIVING STANDARDS

Are you better off than your parents?

[tick one]

a) A lot better off ☐
b) A little wealthier ☐
c) Neither wealthier nor poorer ☐
d) A little poorer ☐
e) A lot poorer ☐

6) EDUCATION

Who paid for it?

[tick one for the single most important funding source]

a) Your parents ☐
b) Your family other than your parents ☐
c) The state ('free') ☐
d) Combination of the above ☐
e) Scholarships/special grants ☐
f) Yourself (working/bank loans) ☐

When did you finish full-time study?

a) Never started (no school at all) ☐
b) At the legal minimum (usually mid-teens) ☐
c) Before taking degree or equivalent ☐
d) After taking degree or equivalent ☐
e) Never finished (or not yet) ☐

7) POSSESSIONS

Which of the following do you own?

[tick as many as apply}

a) Home ☐
b) Car ☐
c) Burglar alarm ☐
d) Camcorder ☐
e) Grand piano ☐
f) Horse ☐
g) Jacuzzi ☐
h) Mobile phone ☐
i) Second home ☐
j) Dishwasher ☐
k) Rolex, Cartier or equivalent watch ☐
l) None of these ☐

8) SPARE TIME

What do you attend, watch or take part in?

[tick no more than two]

a) Ballet ☐
b) Bingo ☐
c) Bridge ☐
d) Casino gambling ☐
e) Cricket/baseball ☐
f) Golf ☐
g) Horse racing ☐
h) Fox hunting ☐
i) Shooting ☐
j) Opera ☐
k) Pigeon fancying ☐
l) Fishing ☐
m) Polo ☐
n) Sailing ☐
o) Yoga ☐
p) Skiing ☐
q) Soccer ☐
r) Tennis ☐
s) Theatre ☐
t) Boxing ☐
u) Motor racing ☐
v) Jogging ☐
w) Dinner parties ☐
x) Bowling ☐
y) Video games ☐
z) Aerobics ☐

9) DRINKING

What do you usually drink?

[tick no more than two]

a) Beer ☐
b) Lager ☐
c) Blended whisky/bourbon ☐
d) Cappuccino/filter coffee ☐
e) Champagne ☐
f) Cheap wine ☐
g) Gin and tonic ☐
h) Instant coffee ☐
i) Tea ☐
j) Darjeeling tea ☐
k) Mineral water ☐
l) Sherry ☐
m) Malt whiskey ☐
n) Vodka ☐
o) Vintage wine ☐
p) Cola or similar ☐

10) HOW FAR ARE YOU PREPARED TO GO?

What have you done to improve your class position?

[tick as many as apply]

a) Disowned your parents ☐
b) Faked academic qualifications ☐
c) Falsified your resumé/cv ☐
d) Lied about your background ☐
e) Name-dropped people you barely know ☐
f) Sent your children to private school despite your principles ☐
g) Lied about your current status ☐

11) EARNINGS

What are your total earnings from all sources in a typical year?

[tick one]

a) $1,000,000 plus ☐
b) $250,001-$1,000,000 ☐
c) $100,001-$250,000 ☐
d) $50,001-$100,000 ☐
e) $25,001-$50,000 ☐
f) $10,001-$25,000 ☐
g) $5,001-$10,000 ☐
h) less than $5,000 ☐

12) AUTHORITY

From whom do you take orders?

[tick as many as apply]

a) No-one ☐
b) Superiors at work ☐
c) Shareholders ☐
d) Landlords ☐
e) Parents ☐
f) Customers ☐
g) Anyone ☐

* * *

SCORES

1 WORK: the most important single indicator of your class status is whether you derive your income (if you have one) as an employee or an owner.
a) 0; **b)** 30; **c)** 20; **d)** 10; **e)** 5; **f)** 45; **g)** 30; **h)** 40; **i)** 25; **j)** 25; **k)** 5 or 30 (if 'white-collar); **l)** 25 **m)** 30; **n)** 45 **o)** 0.

2 EXPECTATIONS: ambition counts for a lot, but there's a difference between what you'd ideally want and what you really expect – give yourself marks only for what you're sure is realistic.
a) 30; **b)** 25; **c)** 20; **d)** 15; **e)** 10; **f)** 5; **g)** 0.

3 CREDIT: Your credit rating is a benchmark of your financial status: it's how the system decides where you fit, and it depends in good measure on the 'assets' you possess. Very few people have ever launched themselves up the class hierarchy, or managed to avoid falling back, without ready access to credit.
a) 50; **b)** 40; **c)** 30; **d)** 25; **e)** 20; **f)** 15; **g)** 10; **h)** 0.

4 INHERITANCE: whatever you may think to the contrary, the 'owning' or ruling class almost always relies on inherited privilege in hard cash for its status, and without it your chances of making headway in the class struggle are very much reduced.
a) 50; **b)** 40; **c)** 30; **d)** 25; **e)** 20; **f)** 15; **g)** 10; **h)** 0.

5 LIVING STANDARDS: well, even if you're not doing so well, at least if you're better off than your parents you can feel superior to someone and tell yourself you've made it yourself; if you're sliding backwards you'll have to deduct points.
a) 20; **b)** 10; **c)** 0; **d)** -10; **e)** -20.

6 EDUCATION: 'qualifications' do matter, but little more than the exclusiveness of the education you received and your 'contacts' – the first lesson in class distinction.
1 **a)** 25; **b)** 20; **c)** 5; **d)** 10; **e)** 15; **f)** 10.
2 **a)** 0; **b)** 5; **c)** 10; **d)** 15; **e)** 5.

7 POSSESSIONS: – as they say – are nine-tenths of the law. Even at the

bottom of the class pile you probably possess something, but the nearer you get to the top the more important it becomes that what you possess is patently extravagant.
a) 15; **b)** 10; **c)** 20; **d)** 10; **e)** 25; **f)** 25; **g)** 25; **h)** 10; **i)** 30; **j)** 15; **k)** 25; **l)** 0.

8 SPARE TIME: having the resources to spend money on 'spare time' or 'entertainment' is pretty important to your status because the company you keep and the tastes you share may decide whether the class you aspire to is willing to accept you as a member.
a) 15; **b)** 5; **c)** 15; **d)** 20; **e)** 10; **f)** 15; **g)** 15; **h)** 30; **i)** 25; **j)** 30; **k)** 5; **l)** 10; **m)** 35; **n)** 20; **o)** 20; **p)** 20; **q)** 5; **r)** 15; **s)** 15; **t)** 5; **u)** 10; **v)** 10; **w)** 15; **x)** 5; **y)** 5; **z)** 10.

9 DRINKING: hard drinkers may not be too bothered how it comes, but our taste in drinks reflects very closely the class associations they have. Mark yourself only for what you most commonly drink during an ordinary week.
a) 5; **b)** 5; **c)** 15; **d)** 15; **e)** 20; **f)** 10; **g)** 15; **h)** 5; **i)** 5; **j)** 15; **k)** 10; **l)** 15; **m)** 20; **n)** 10; **o)** 20; **p)** 5.

10 HOW FAR ARE YOU PREPARED TO GO?: You can pick up a lot of points here, for *trying*. Award yourself 10 points for each one.

11 EARNINGS: in the end, there's no getting away from it – the amount of hard cash you pocket on a regular basis is more important than anything else in determining the 'capital' you are able to accumulate, or otherwise, and thus your class position.
a) 80; **b)** 60; **c)** 50; **d)** 40; **e)** 30; **f)** 20; **g)** 10; **h)** 0.

12 AUTHORITY: deduct 5 for every one you tick, except **a)**, and deduct 10 if you ticked **g)**.

Now add up your points:

MY SCORE....................

WHERE YOU FIT:
This test is just a bit of fun and not 'scientific' at all. But marketing executives around the world spend a great deal of time and money thinking about class: about who to 'target' and how to appeal to different 'segments' of the market: and it works! They routinely use the following classifications:

POINTS SCORE
NEEDED TO BELONG TO:
A: Aristocracy/ruling – 501+
B: Upper middle – 301 to 500
C1: Middle – 151 to 300
C2: Working/lower – 51 to 150
D/E: Underclass – less than 50

Acknowledgement: Greg Hadfield and Mark Skipworth, *Class: Where do you stand?* Bloomsbury, London, 1994.

TRYGRE BØLSTAD / PANOS PICTURES

Who will change the world?

The women's movement in India may have ducked issues of class, but the political parties of the Left ignored gender before that – and both still prefer to avoid any reference to caste. **Urvashi Butalia** goes in search of a proper place for each in the struggle to transform society.

Sisterhood, cutting across classes, religions, ethnic divides, castes, has been a cherished article of faith for feminists in India. It's what unites: we might well have coined a new slogan to match the old one about workers of the world uniting. We would call upon sisters of the world to unite and somehow, magically, they would.

A series of developments over the last several years has resulted in some rethinking. The increasing appeal of fundamentalism, both Hindu and Muslim, and the rise of right-wing fascism have relied in large measure on the participation of women – who've not hesitated to turn against and be violent towards other women just because they belong to a different religious group. Where, activists have asked, has sisterhood gone?

More or less contemporaneously, the opening up of the Indian economy to foreign capital – what is known as 'globalization' – and its creation of a new class made up largely of women workers, have led feminists to think that perhaps they need to think of class too, in addition to gender.

If feminists have been guilty of ignoring class, the Left movement in India – for whom the class struggle has been no less of a cherished article of faith – has been equally guilty of ignoring gender. Founded in the 1930s, the Indian Communist Party's leadership today remains heavily upper-class, upper-caste and *male*. Not only are there no women leaders of any stature, but most of the Party's trade unions remain male-dominated – and most have been reluctant to address what they see as 'troublesome' issues such as domestic violence and sexual harassment.

With one movement privileging class above all else, and the other gender, both the organized Left and the women's movement seemed to have missed out on other aspects, such as religion, ethnic identity and – that most-difficult-of-all issues – caste. Increasingly these categories were being used to mobilize groups, creating a kind of internal unity but at the same time resulting in a 'difference', as they measured themselves up against what they were not.

Achin Vinaik, a political activist and scientist, believes that 'many of us make the mistake of thinking class is located only at the bottom. Actually it is much more at the top. Look at Reaganism and Thatcherism. Look at the kind of capitalism we have today. Do you think the corporate world doesn't know what class is about?'

The question then is, will the class struggle change the world, or will the women's movement do so? Or is it that groups – some based on caste, others on ethnic identity – are all engaged in the process of social transformation, and no one category should be privileged over the others? 'What we need to be thinking of,' says Vinaik, 'is a sort of radical pluralism – many categories, a juxtaposition of agencies working for radical transformation. And with the working class no longer the hub.'

But there's a danger with 'radical pluralism' as well. There was a time in India when the Left, or broadly socialist movements, attracted thousands of young, idealistic, politically committed people. Whatever their differences, they were able to forge alliances across their somewhat varying but broadly similar positions. Today, as activism becomes more and more specialized, the danger is of connections disappearing. And that's when the plus of pluralism can become a minus.

Actually, says Uma Chakravarti, a teacher at Delhi University, 'what we need is more sensitivity to other forms of oppression than the one we may, as a particular group, privilege. That's the common factor different groups need to hang on to. That's what will enable us to keep a broad, democratic horizon without falling into the "primacy" thesis. Why, for example, do we no longer connect capitalism and women's oppression and therefore issues of class and gender? Why not connect the struggle of marginalized groups with the women's movement? The common factor is oppression – it may simply wear a different face each time. And each time, we'll need to match the strategy to the face. But that doesn't mean we forget about all the other faces. That's what change is about.' ■

Urvashi Butalia is a writer and editor. She works in Delhi with Kali for Women, India's first feminist publishing house, which she co-founded in 1984.

Gold coast

Daniel Mensah Brande describes the structural adjustments in Ghana that have kept the suffering masses from dancing in the corridors of power.

THE first European colony south of the Sahara to crow the dawn of political independence, Ghana is a symbol of post-independence Africa's pride and prejudice. Known in the dictionary of colonialism as the 'Gold Coast' for its riches in gold, it also has on sale the relics of the authentic African traditional system of government, discoloured by the bleaching agents of colonialism. Here – and for that matter anywhere else in contemporary Black Africa – class interacts with ethnicity, flirts with gender, interferes with geography, collides with time and space. But one thing remains certain. Ghana has never been classless.

The modern state of Ghana, like many others in Africa, is an artwork of colonialism. Before the European economic adventure into Africa the geographical area presently called Ghana was filled with traditional African states, the most powerful of which was the Ashanti kingdom. These traditional political entities had well-organized systems of government. They also had well-defined class systems which supervised their daily activities and differentiated the leader from the led, the possessors from the dispossessed.

The advent of Western colonialism led to the emergence of a new class system. Even though European colonialism used traditional chiefs to pursue its goals, it presided over the decline of their political power. The new privileged class was made up of what could be called the foreign bourgeoisie and the African petit-bourgeoisie.

Independence in 1957 brought another new class system. This – indeed, like the colonial system before it – should really best be divided into two: the oppressors and the oppressed. Soul-searching segmentation of the social structure does, however, give three well-delineated classes: the upper class, the fast-diminishing middle class and the rapidly-increasing suffering masses. Each of these classes can be further sub-divided, for there are the highest among the high as well as the lowest among the low.

Looting sprees

The upper classes are the operators of the state apparatus and their local and foreign entourage. This group of people – government officials and their kin and cronies, members of the ruling political party/military junta, senior military and police officials and local and foreign entrepreneurs closely associated with the establishment – controls the economic and political destiny of the country. Together, they appropriate the resources of the State. Many of them loot state money, deposit it in their bank accounts abroad and import luxury consumer goods. Members of this class seem to hold the belief that what

ABBAS / MAGNUM

belongs to the State belongs to no-one. Public goods belong to the public: therefore one can help oneself as much as one's position permits. So they embark on state-coffer looting-sprees, stripping the economy naked. Those who use their positions within the state apparatus to become rich are, in fact, criticized only when they fail to distribute their gains to their families, entourage and network. For them, stealing state money is not a crime – but one may be punished for letting oneself be seen while stealing it.

The middle classes enjoyed a degree of respectability and comfort in the embryonic years of Ghana's independence. But as national politics and the economy fell into the gutter, members of this class voiced their resentment at the undemocratic way the nation was being driven, and the gap between them and the rulers began to widen. They were labelled 'saboteurs of state security' and were watched constantly, carefully and nervously. This, coupled with the sentence of death on the national economy pronounced by the IMF/World Bank Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), reduced the middle class to near-paupers.

The intellectual community felt the shock more than any other. The SAP turned educational institutions into a marketplace of chaos. Teaching facilities were stretched to the point of collapse and denied repairs, let alone replacement. Laboratories became ill-equipped and libraries starved of publications. Some university lecturers converted their cars into taxi cabs to earn extra income. Others tried to endear themselves to the State to get appointments to parastatal boardrooms as directors or managers. A series of strikes closed universities on several occasions.

The lowest class, the suffering masses, is increasing fast. Members of the middle class are demoted into it at an amazing rate. This class – workers, farmers, school teachers, most of the operators in the informal sector, the under-employed and the unemployed – contains the most marginalized people in Ghana. But the degree of marginalization varies. The rural poor are more marginalized than their urban counterparts; women bear the brunt more than men. The SAP has, for example, removed the subsidy on kerosene for poor farmers, while an incredible tax system takes 65 per cent of their potential income from cocoa. The economic reforms drastically reduced real wages, while many fell victim to 'retrenchment' programmes designed to cut employment.

Child labour

Some women who are denied other employment have taken to prostitution, while men engage in armed robbery and drug pushing. The Kwame Nkrumah Circle in Ghana's capital, Accra, is gradually becoming a red-light district comparable to those in European cities like Amsterdam and Hamburg. It is not uncommon for women in their thirties in Ghana to have grandchildren, for little girls as young as 13 are mothers.

The situation is so alarming that there appears to be an acute shortage of young men prepared to carry the economic responsibility of marriage. Because parents are not able to fend for their children, child labour is becoming an established feature of Ghanaian society. The population of street children grows. Economically displaced youth from the rural areas floods the urban centres, putting more pressure on already choked social facilities.

It is not uncommon for women in their thirties to have grandchildren, for little girls as young as 13 are mothers

To survive, most members of the suffering masses must enter the fast-expanding underground economy. Even here Government officials use their positions to gain a disproportionate share of the wealth the 'second economy' generates, reflecting and accentuating the inequality of power still further. But at least here the deprived class gains some access to resources.

Traditional security systems which provided economic insurance for the poor have been eroded. The extended family, which imposed upon its economically able members a duty to help the others, has disappeared. Regarded once as the fountain of wisdom and the link between the living and the dead, and held in high esteem as an indispensable asset of society, the aged in Ghana today are the most miserable of people. They have been rejected and left to their own devices. Research by HelpAge Ghana shows that a good number of the elderly are malnourished and suffering from hunger- and stress-induced diseases.

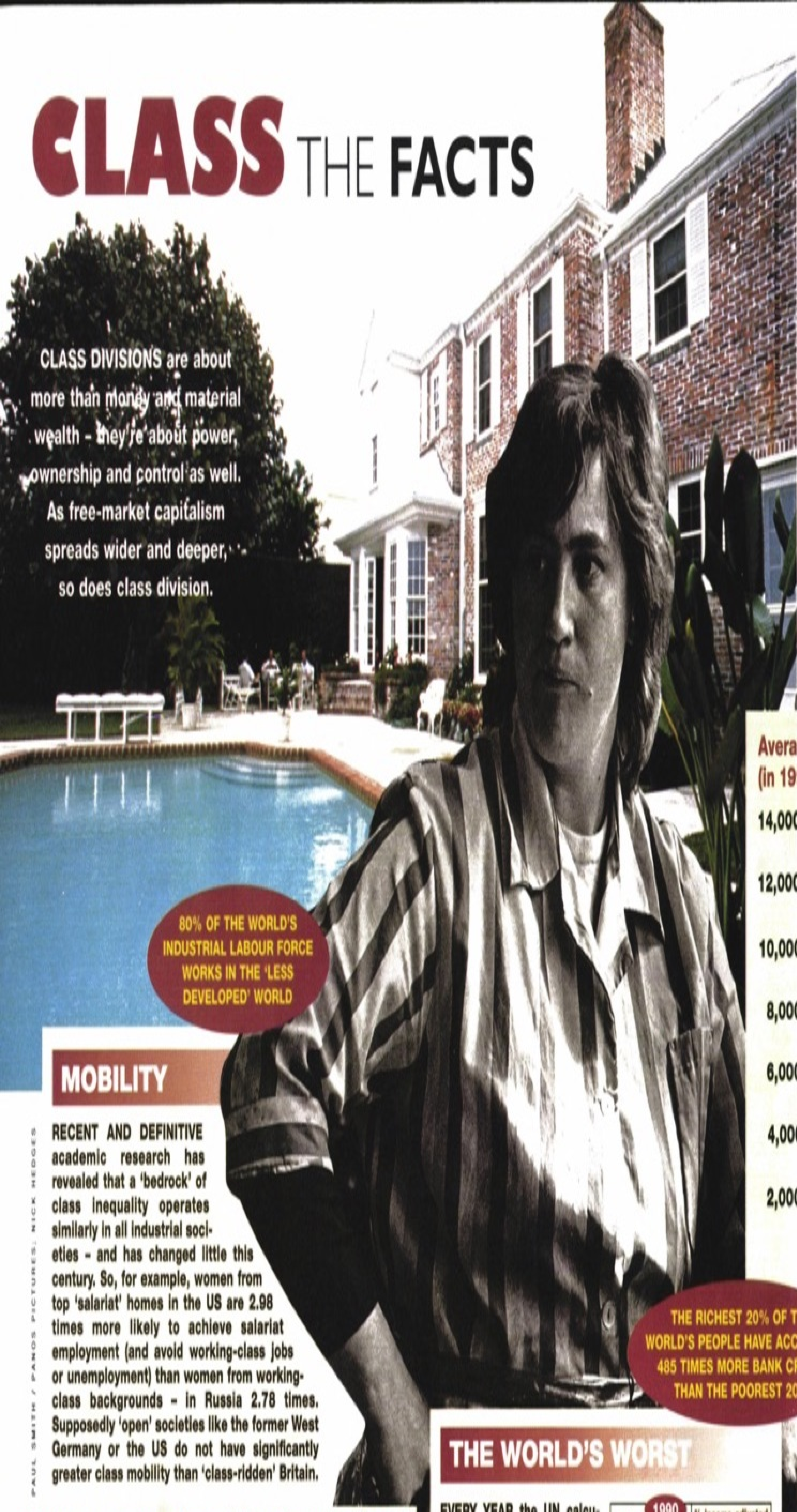
Class differentials in terms of economic power have often led to collision between workers and the middle class on the one hand and the ruling class on the other. Workers, school teachers, university lecturers, doctors, nurses and other professionals have embarked on strikes and demonstrations aimed at registering their protest against the yawning economic gap between the haves and the have-nots.

The military usually exploit the discontent of the people to launch revolutions with high hopes and promises to perform economic miracles, only to fall victim to the corruption and economic mismanagement they have come to expose, thus pushing the people into further hardships. In 1980, Jerry John Rawlings launched a popular revolution with the slogan 'Power to the People'. But as the revolution began dancing through the corridors of power, the soldiers began to enjoy its fruits, and power quickly slipped through the hands of the people back into the waiting arms of its former owners – the few among the many.

The suffering masses who toil to keep the economy of the country moving have never seen the colour of political power. ■

Daniel Mensah Brande is a journalist and broadcaster based in Accra.

CLASS THE FACTS



CLASS DIVISIONS are about more than money and material wealth – they're about power, ownership and control as well. As free-market capitalism spreads wider and deeper, so does class division.

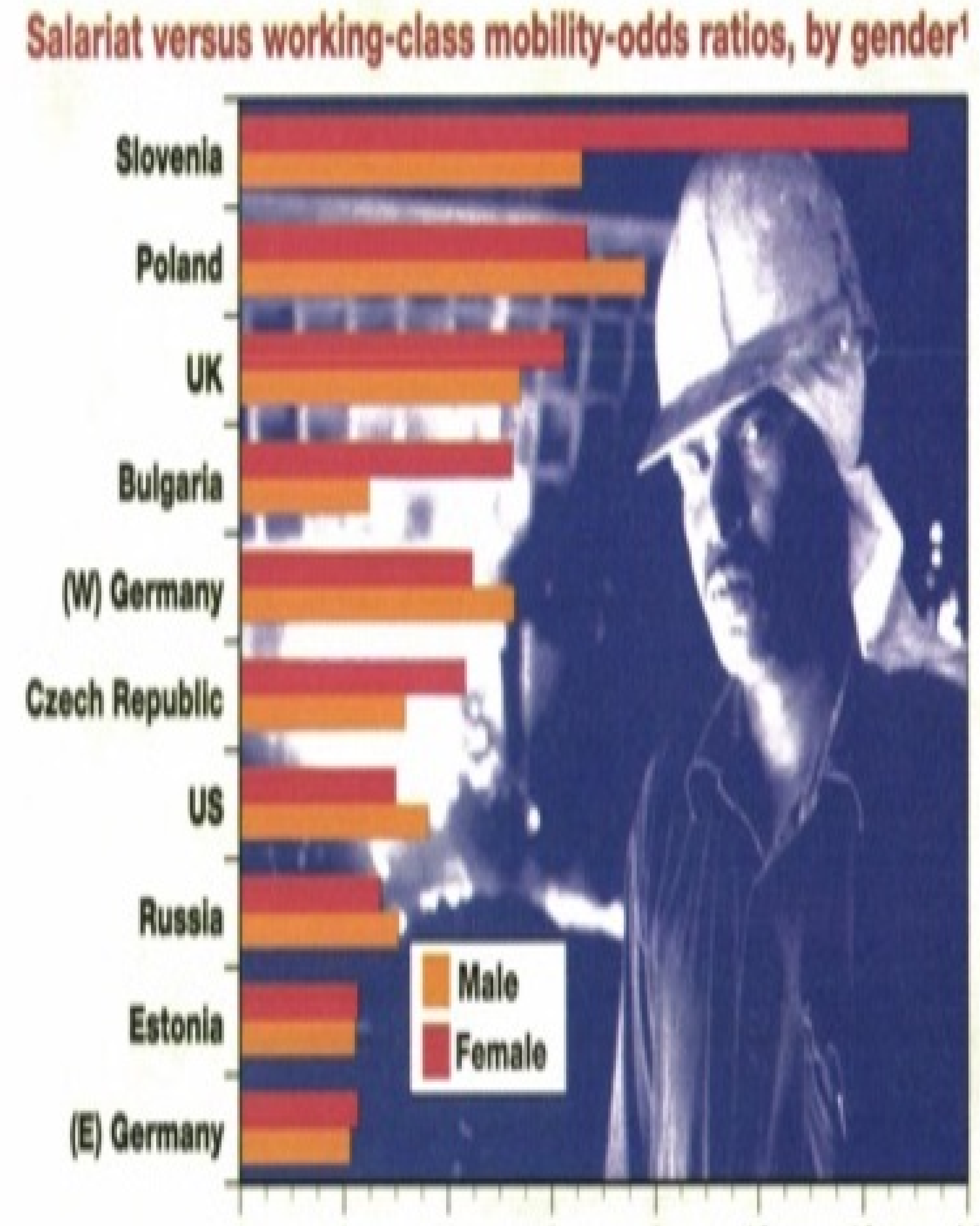
80% OF THE WORLD'S INDUSTRIAL LABOUR FORCE WORKS IN THE 'LESS DEVELOPED' WORLD

PAUL SMITH / PANOS PICTURES; NICK HEDGES

MOBILITY

RECENT AND DEFINITIVE academic research has revealed that a 'bedrock' of class inequality operates similarly in all industrial societies – and has changed little this century. So, for example, women from top 'salariat' homes in the US are 2.98 times more likely to achieve salariat employment (and avoid working-class jobs or unemployment) than women from working-class backgrounds – in Russia 2.78 times. Supposedly 'open' societies like the former West Germany or the US do not have significantly greater class mobility than 'class-ridden' Britain.

Salariat versus working-class mobility-odds ratios, by gender[1]



For each country the odds ratio shows the chances of someone born into the salariat staying where they are or moving down to a working-class destination, compared with the reverse for someone born in the working class.

THE RICHEST 20% OF THE WORLD'S PEOPLE HAVE ACCESS TO 485 TIMES MORE BANK CREDIT THAN THE POOREST 20%

THE WORLD'S WORST

EVERY YEAR the UN calculates a 'Human Development Index' (HDI) for all the countries of the world, from which points are deducted for high levels of inequality. Brazil has one of the most unequal distributions of income in the world, with the richest 20% of Brazilians receiving 26 times the income of the bottom 20%.

This results in a 16.38% reduction in its HDI score. Some industrial countries once thought of as more 'egalitarian' than others – like Aotearoa/New Zealand – which have implemented 'free-market' reforms, are now among the most divided. The worst of the 53 countries for which this information is available feature in this table.

1990 ALL COUNTRIES	% income-adjusted reduction in HDI[3]
Nepal	-23.20
Brazil	-16.38
Côte d'Ivoire	-16.07
Jamaica	-14.37
Panama	-12.91
Honduras	-12.84
Turkey	-10.34
INDUSTRIAL COUNTRIES	
Portugal	-6.30
Aotearoa/NZ	-4.11
Australia	-4.04
Canada	-3.68
France	-3.53
Italy	-3.51
United States	-3.44

OWNERSHIP

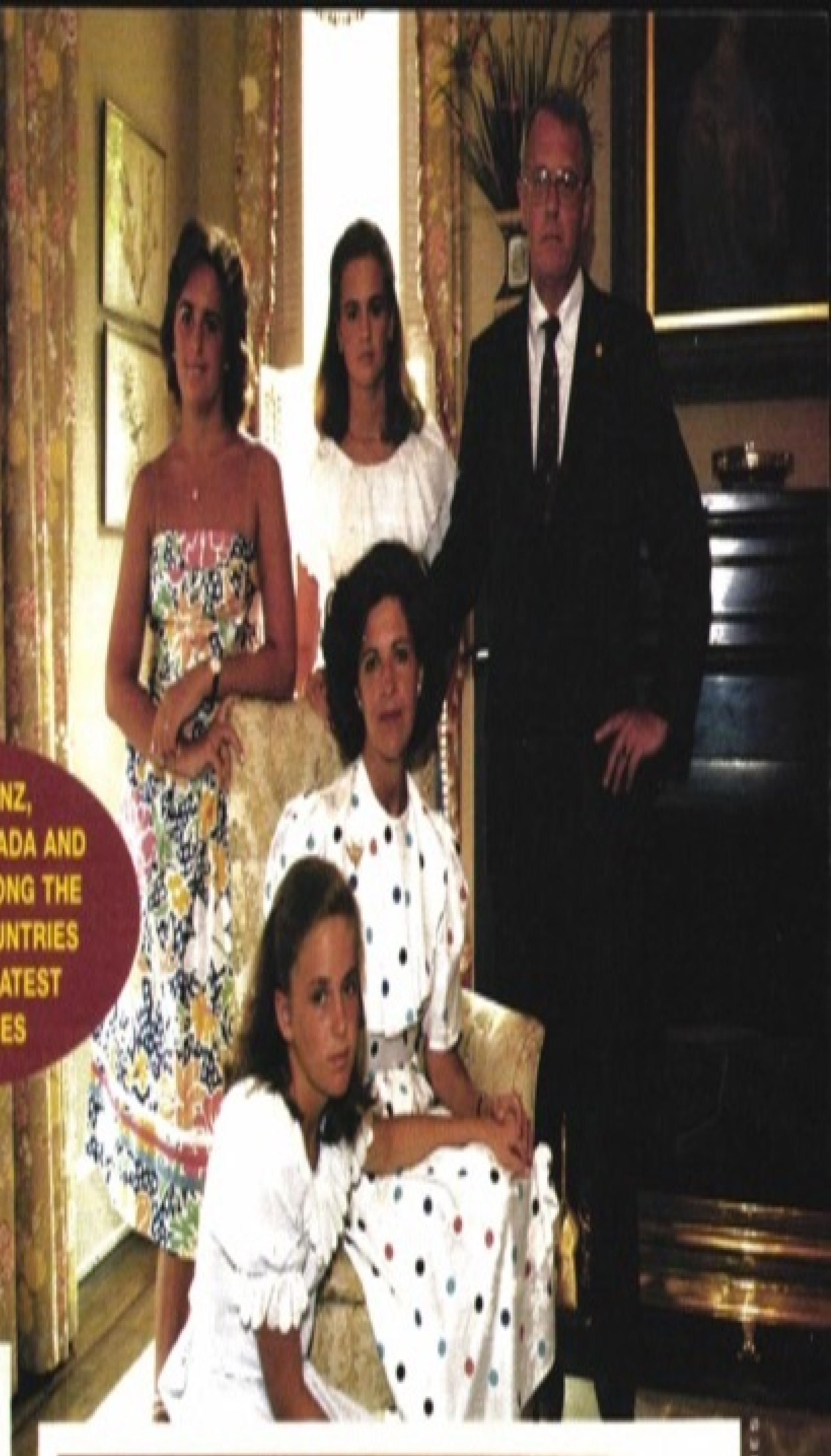
IT'S NOT JUST HOW MUCH YOU EARN, but what you *own* – the power and privilege that ownership conveys – that matters. Wealth *accumulates* for the wealthy. The disparities of ownership are even greater than those of income:

◆ In 1983, *two-thirds* of all individual wealth in the US was owned by the top 10% of the population.

◆ By 1989 the richest 0.5% of US households (some 419,000 families) had increased their share of total private wealth in the US from 24% to 29% – they could have paid off the entire national debt in 1989 and still have been left with about 10% more net worth than they had in 1983.

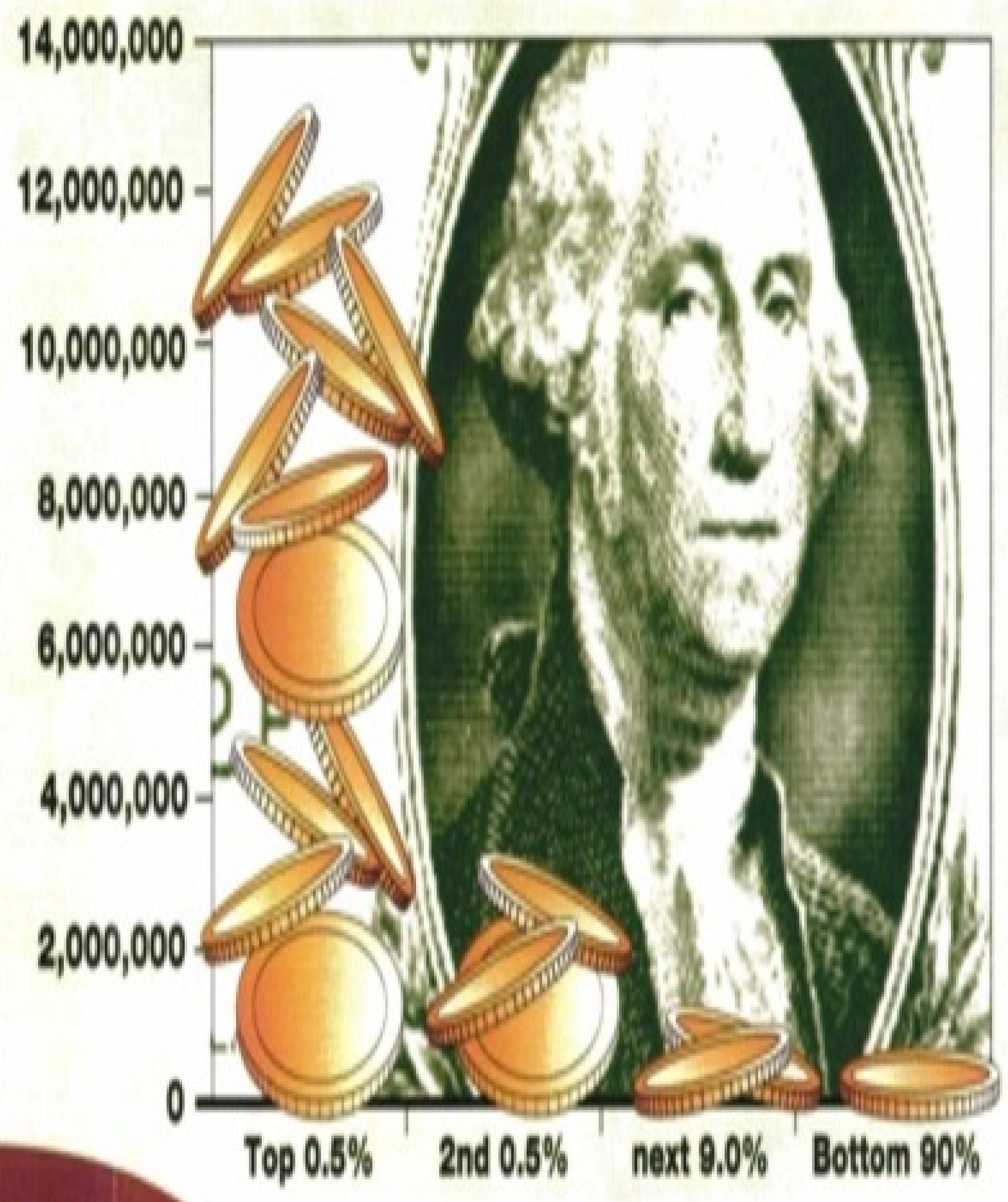
◆ Then, between 1989 and 1995, the valuation of the Dow Jones Industrial Average of shares doubled, and with it the value of the 80% of all US financial assets that are held by the top 10% of American households, hugely increasing the value of their assets.

AOTEAROA/NZ, AUSTRALIA, CANADA AND THE US ARE AMONG THE INDUSTRIAL COUNTRIES WITH THE GREATEST INEQUALITIES



ALAIN LE GARSMEUR / PANOS PICTURES

Average net worth of US families 1989 (in 1995 dollars)[4]



INEQUALITY

THE GAP BETWEEN rich and poor is getting wider everywhere. But it is wider in some areas of activity than in others.

◆ The richest 20% of the world's people now have a virtual monopoly of access to commercial bank lending – an astonishing 485 times more than the poorest 20%, who in effect have no access at all.

◆ The main reason for this is that the richest 20% own assets which they can use as 'collateral' for loans, whereas the poorest 20% own virtually nothing.

WIDENING GAPS BETWEEN RICH AND POOR[3]

Percentage of global economic activity, selected categories.

	1960/70	1989
INCOME		
Richest 20%	70.2	82.7
Poorest 20%	2.3	1.4
Ratio richest to poorest	30 to 1	59 to 1
TRADE		
Richest 20%	80.8	81.2
Poorest 20%	1.3	1.0
Ratio richest to poorest	62 to 1	86 to 1
COMMERCIAL BANK LENDING		
Richest 20%	**72.3**	**94.6**
Poorest 20%	**0.3**	**0.2**
Ratio richest to poorest	**326 to 1**	**485 to 1**

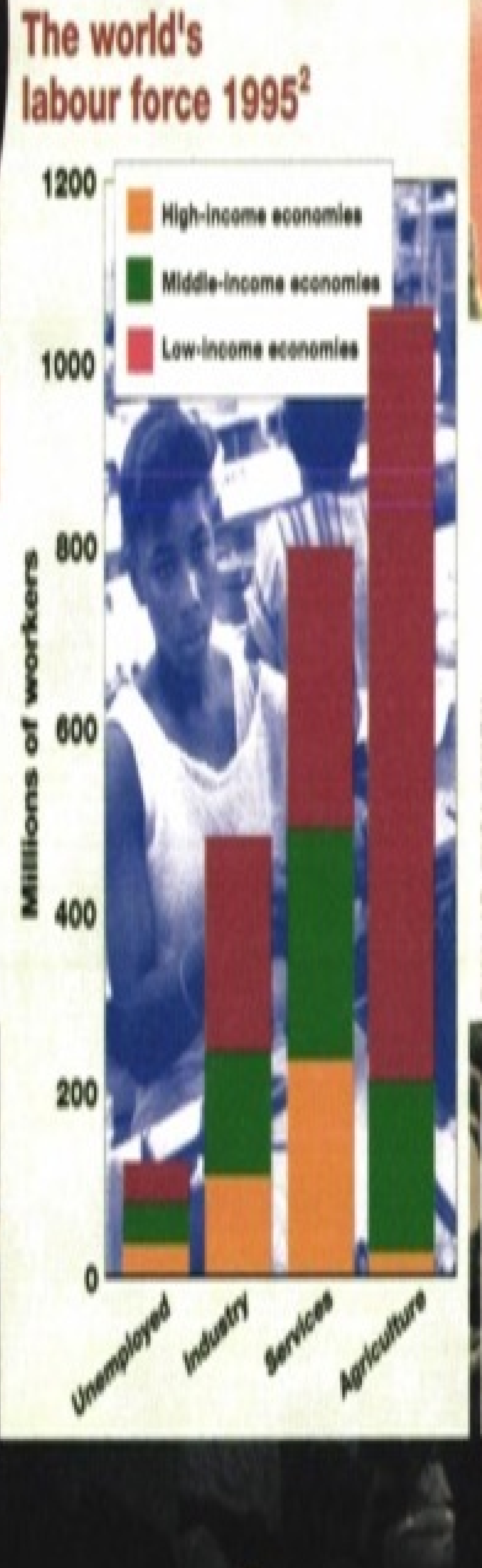
PAUL SMITH / PANOS PICTURES

WORK

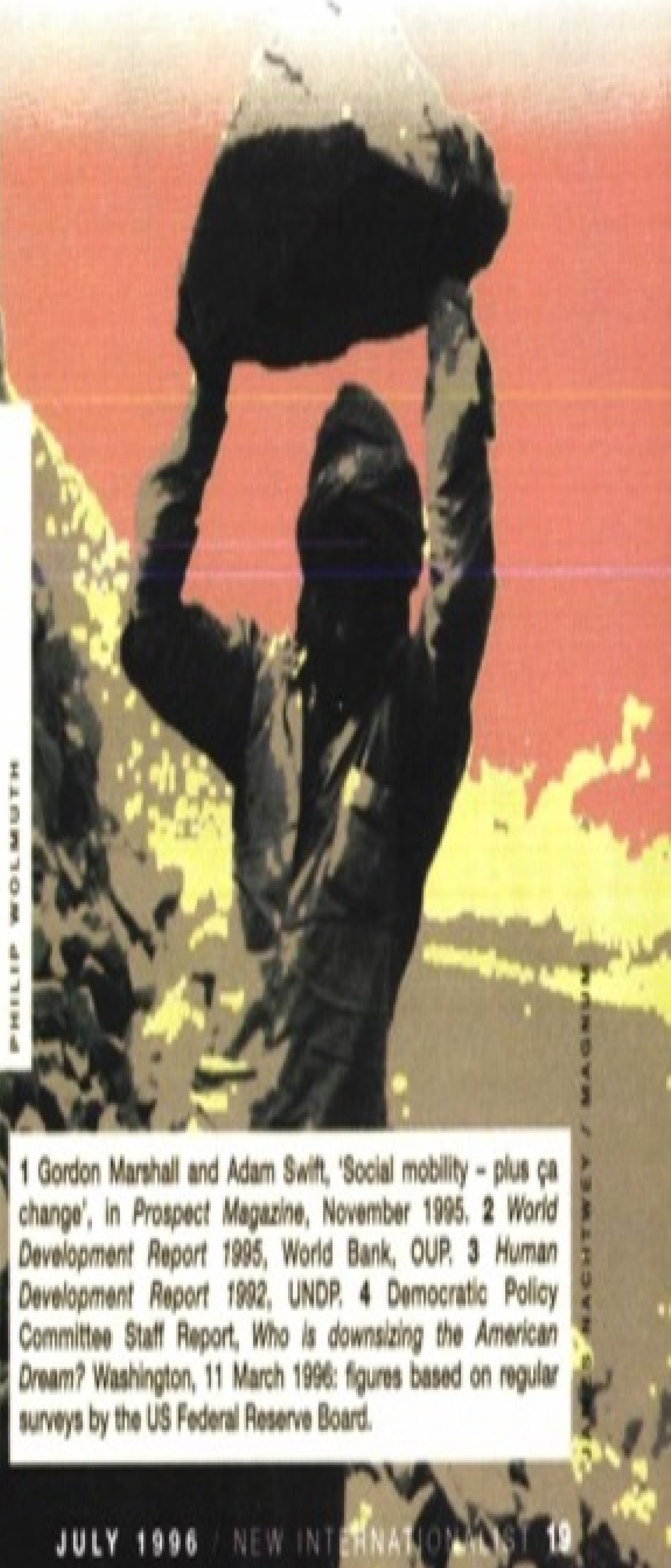
THE COUNTRIES OF THE SOUTH now account for 80 per cent of the world's 'working class', its industrial workforce. In the North more people now work in service industries than in factories, though in the world as a whole more people still work in agriculture than in any other single category.

BETWEEN 1983 AND 1989 THE RICHEST 0.5% OF US HOUSEHOLDS INCREASED THEIR SHARE OF TOTAL PRIVATE WEALTH FROM 24% TO 29%

The world's labour force 1995[2]



PHILIP WOLMUTH



NACHTWEY / MAGNUM

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1 Gordon Marshall and Adam Swift, 'Social mobility – plus ça change', in *Prospect Magazine*, November 1995. 2 *World Development Report 1995*, World Bank, OUP. 3 *Human Development Report 1992*, UNDP. 4 Democratic Policy Committee Staff Report, *Who is downsizing the American Dream?* Washington, 11 March 1996: figures based on regular surveys by the US Federal Reserve Board.

TRYGVE BØLSTAD / PANOS PICTURES

Hands without bodies

Jeremy Seabrook charts the course of an epic shift: of industry from North to South, and of self-confidence from workers to workaholics.

For two hundred years of industrial development there have been constant efforts to cut labour and labour costs. Written into the whole project has been a sustained attempt by capital to eliminate, diminish and disgrace labour – to get it at the cheapest price and to prevent workers from combining to express their own power.

Every technological innovation has dis-employed people and evicted them from familiar ways of working, before absorbing them – or their children – into new forms of labour. It has been a story of driven, perpetual mobility and change. The industrial system has found ever-more ingenious ways of discarding human beings: manufacture, machinofacture, automation, robotization, *jidoka* (the investing of machines with human-like intelligence). People have continuously become redundant, de-skilled, unwanted, superfluous to productive requirements.

It took labour the first half of the nineteenth century, according to the historian Eric Hobsbawm, to understand the rules of the capitalist game – a game into which it had been enlisted against its will. It took another half century for workers to learn how to apply the rules in their own interests. The first half of the twentieth century saw the highest point of labour organization, solidarity and self-confidence: the second half has witnessed the unmaking of this achievement.

The decline of class consciousness in the Western industrial countries is well documented. It is, in part at least, a consequence of the decline of the basic industries of the early industrial era, which created a sense of shared predicament, a common culture and the need for collective resistance and solidarity. The end of much mining and manufacture, the increased mechanization of production and the export of labour-intensive work to the Third World have left a generation in the West with a sense of damaged purpose and injured function.

In the vacuum the epic, heroic tradition which gave strength and hope to the struggles of labour seems to have vanished. In fact, it has been the object of a strange appropriation, not by the workers by hand or brain but – paradoxically and audaciously – by the most powerful and privileged.

Role usurped

According to them, the work of society is now both too scarce and too important to be left to the working class. They see themselves as the new martyrs of self-sacrificing labour: business tycoons, makers of fortunes, executives of transnational corporations, financiers and wheeler-dealers, speculators in strange abstractions – futures, derivatives, invisibles – global celebrities and media stars whose busy mobility sets armies of subordinates, servicers and hangers-on dancing. The generators of wealth have usurped a role which in some versions of history once belonged to the oppressed and work-burdened labouring poor.

The commitment to work is at its most showy in what is portrayed as the punishing schedules of corporate commuters, the sufferings they endure in a series of identical luxury hotels, the jet-lag and the hangovers from the hospitality that is part of their duty to boost exports, chase orders, make contacts, open up markets, clock up sales; the indulgence of potential customers on rain-swept golf-courses, discreet sex parlours; the vast expenditure of energy in a pursuit of volatile and punitive markets which burns people up before they reach the age of 35.

These devotees of labour can often be heard wishing they had a humdrum, nine-to-five job, envying those who work merely for the wage-packet. Such carefree employees don't wake up in the early hours with a parched throat, trembling with the responsibility of having to face all those people in the morning; they aren't up at dawn, scribbling down notes, the outline of a lecture, a few selling points, ideas on a new creative thrust that will keep some brand fresh, relevant and motivating; they don't get up feeling like nothing on earth, knowing they must be at their sparkling best for that 10.30 meeting, ransacking an inadequate wardrobe for something to give that little extra life so that their contract will not be abruptly terminated. They can be heard loudly justifying their self-administered consolations: 'What's wrong with share options?.. My doctor says I must get out from under... I need a break... A ski-ing holiday... The *gîte* in France...' or more commonly, at the end of each exhausting day, 'I need a drink...'

Never in the history of labour has there been such a claim to tribute as the wealth-creators extort for themselves today

It amounts to a self-immolating excess of labour that should, we are told, properly command awe and compassion from those who perform less exalted tasks in the world. Never in the history of labour has there been such a claim to tribute as the wealth-creators extort for themselves today.

Of course all this is mummery, ornament, decoration – the gilded facade of a society whose principal product is images, the reflection of dazzling surfaces. It is made possible only because the really damaging, destructive labour of the earth has been exported from the Western heartlands to the sulphurous, poisonous sites of exploitative labour in the growing industrial areas of the South.

The images that remain from the chroniclers of nineteenth-century industrial Britain – Engels, Mayhew, Booth – have not vanished from the earth. They spring to vibrant life in the barracks of manufacturing in the South, a slavery to overshadow even the infernal sites of a Britain that not so long ago thought fit to see workers as nothing but disembodied hands. Unknown places, where so many of our daily necessities are now made: shoes, clothes, TV sets, plastic goods, toys, handbags, jewellery, blue jeans. Unnamed places, like the frightful slums of Tangerang and Bekasi in Jakarta, shielded from public scrutiny by guards with guns, protectors of the frontiers of poverty; the row-houses in Bangkok where young countrywomen, industrial captives, work 16 hours a day to make shirts, and eat and sleep in the workplace; where productivity-drives mean spiking the drinking water of workers with amphetamines; where half-a-million young women live in bamboo huts in Dhaka to furnish us with cheap garments, and receive 66 US cents a day for the privilege of doing so.

The sub-contractors to the transnationals are mostly Korean, Singaporean, Taiwanese – tigers grown fat on human flesh – and they place a buffer of 'respectability' around the brutalities of the work-place. In Jakarta workers meet and organize under a military prohibition that echoes the Combination Laws of Britain at the end of the eighteenth century.

Suicide rate

Uprootings, forced migrations, the violent re-working of the sensibility of people from the subsistence economy of seed-time and harvest to the rhythms of factory labour; all this increased the suicide rate in Thailand by 60 per cent in one year, from 1994 to 1995. Parts of Bangkok have concentrations of dust particles ten times the maximum safe level. Dysentery, cholera and TB rage through the slums built beside the once-fragrant pools of Dhaka. In Bangkok a fire breaks out in a doll factory into which the workers are locked so that they may work unsupervised, and 200 young people die. The slums that occupy land required for more profitable purposes than housing for workers are gutted by petrol bombs.

In the frightful mines of India stunted,

CLASS OF '96 – AUSTRALIA

FERTILIZING THE RICH

Maria is 24 and was born in Chile. She has been unemployed since leaving university two years ago.

MY PARENTS CAME HERE FROM SOUTH AMERICA 20 YEARS AGO. Mum was often sick and Dad had to work two jobs to keep us going. They were both proud that I made it to university. I'd call myself an anarchist if pressed for a label. I don't like labels, but sometimes it's the lesser of two evils.

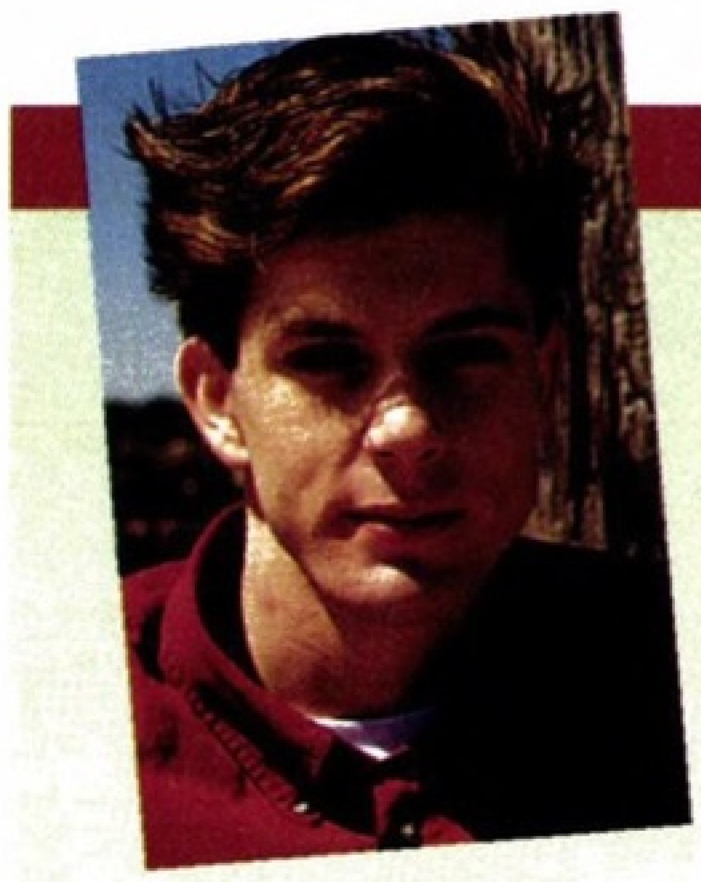
I've been involved in student unions and other movements since mid-High School, but only over the past few years I've noticed that issues of class keep cropping up. What really horrifies me is the way people pretend it doesn't exist, even if it's wrecking their lives. People too easily use other things for scapegoats, or even blame themselves for their situation when it's clearly forces linked with class that are the real cause of their plight.

It's inadequate simply to blame the 'system' as some sort of impersonal force. The 'system' is full of people who've had the benefits of being on the upper rungs of the class system for years, and their families for years before that. I hear of rich people who say they've got money just by hard work. They never make the connection with what's happening with the people who work for them or the families affected, or for those they put out of work or who can never get a good job because they're not educated.

Young people think it's unfashionable to do anything that shows you're pulling rank because of your income or background. But there's so much just beneath the surface. It's even in little things like the way you pronounce words or the fashions you wear. You're quickly made to feel 'outside'.

There's a thin layer of tolerance across our society, and I fear for the day when the layer wears through. There's almost disdain for people of the 'working class'. In other circumstances, or in another time, I wouldn't be surprised if someone passes a law to plough their bodies into the ground to fertilize the rose beds of the rich.

Interview by **George Fisher**



CLASS OF '96 – CANADA

A MATTER OF DEGREES

John Williams is a 21-year-old from a fishing community in Nova Scotia.

GROWING UP IN THE FISHING COMMUNITY of Lockeport everyone was pretty much in the same boat. Like most families, fishing has always put food on our table. For 30 years my father has been an in-shore fisherman, first using 'long-lines' to catch groundfish, now using traps to catch lobster.

Our house, again like most others, is a modest home – middle class I guess you'd call it. But there are a few houses in town that are much bigger, much more expensive, with a new car in the driveway. These belong to owners of large off-shore fishing boats – the 'draggers'.

If class is mostly about money, then a class system has developed in the fisheries. The draggers grew out of businesses that held profit as the only bottom line. They made profit, lots of it, and could buy new and bigger boats, new equipment, and more fish 'quota'. As they say, the rich get richer...

But class doesn't encompass the natural world, and now our community is in crisis – the fish are almost all gone. We have severely over-fished, not so much the small-scale fishers, more so the larger boats. Modern draggers are massive vessels whose nets drag along the sea bottom. Immature and unwanted fish are often caught and destroyed in the nets, which also disrupt the seabed. The fish had been there for hundreds of years, and we thought it would last forever. But you can't keep over-exploiting natural resources and expect them to last forever.

Even though fishing was something I grew up with, surrounded by the culture of the sea, it's not something I – or many of my generation – will work in. Fishing no longer seems a viable option. If you want to make anything of yourself, you have to get out of town – as awful as that sounds, and as much as it might hurt the community. So I've taken out student loans and moved to another province to complete a university degree. Maybe I'll be able to go back home some day if the economy has diversified.

Interview by **Sean Kelly**

subterranean people labour under the same indifference once shown by the coal-owners of South Wales; in Delhi, children work in forges and furnaces, exposed to the molten metal, the embers and hot dust that sear their flesh and corrode their lungs, just as the children of the Black Country did in the 1840s. The child prostitutes trafficked from Burma or Yunnan in China like any other commodity in the free-trade regime of Asia and imprisoned in the brothels of Bombay have the same, sad, wise faces as those rescued by Josephine Butler from the slums of Whitechapel.

Vendors all over the world sell from carts which are identical to those pushed by Mayhew's costermongers – a wooden trestle with two big wheels and a smaller wheel to stabilize the front – even though their products are more exotic than anything known to Victorian London: papaya, noodles, tom yam, bakso, rice, mangoes, custard apples. The logos of the transnationals hissing their gaseous colours against the tropical night suggest a different decor; only the patterns of labour, exploitation and want are the same as those of the labouring poor under different skies, in another century.

So where does this leave the Western working class, dispossessed of its function, haunted by a sense of vanished purpose and thrown on the Smoky Mountain of a global market, where economic integration is accompanied by social and psychic disintegration? The epic of labour has been displaced, the shadow and appearance of it stolen by privilege, the reality removed from sight into the industrial suburbs of distant cities, where livelihood is turned against life itself. The best we can hope for in this division of labour is to beg for jobs, to become supplicants at the great, impersonal distribution of livelihood in the single, global economy.

It is difficult for people to make sense of what is happening in those towns and cities whose very reason for existence has been wiped out. People who made textiles in Lancashire, ships in Newcastle, who dug coal and made woollens in Yorkshire, pottery in Staffordshire, metal goods in Walsall and Dudley, hosiery in Leicester, lace in Nottingham, shoes in Northampton and hats in Luton, have seen a new generation born to a spoiled function and ruined sense of belonging. They have grown, not to labour, but as starvelings of the market, orphaned of the basic need to participate in the necessary work of society.

Death and the dolls: 200 young workers pay the price of cheap labour at the Nakhom doll factory in Bangkok, Thailand.

P AVENTURIER / GAMMA

Denial

It is impossible to exaggerate what a denial of human energies and powers this is: insecurity, a sense of nihilism, futility, lack of participation, not merely in consumption but in active engagement with the production of useful and necessary things; the growth in crime, violence, drugs; the breakdown of neighbourhood and kinship networks. Neither working-class nor privileged, in a kind of limbo without identity: here is a curious new class, ground between those who have robbed us of function and the coercive, relentless labour of the urban poor in the cities of the South.

The epic of labour has not vanished from the world simply because it has been conjured out of sight so that the organized Western working class might forget who they are. To lose a sense of function, hence of identity, and then of consciousness itself, is an unimaginably cruel fate. The decline in membership of trades unions, their decreasing power, their broken resistance, all this is calculated to make us ready, in our insecurity and loss of confidence, to compete with the people of the South, who are still learning the rules of the game, the lessons we thought we had secured for all time.

The convergence between the fate of workers in both North and South, the rich countries and the poor, is becoming more and more plain, though the efforts at concealment by the global possessing classes are both ingenious and desperate. All workers are migrants in the industrial system, in search of rootedness, stability and sufficiency but constantly evicted, uprooted and moved on, condemned to learn afresh the bitter lessons of the imperative of solidarity and resistance. A working class that loses consciousness loses its most precious resource; regaining consciousness, not simply of our position in a national division of labour, but within the context of globalization, is the first requisite if we are to become effective once more. ■

Jeremy Seabrook's most recent book, *In the Cities of the South,* was published by Verso in April. He is preparing a magazine for the **NI** which tells the story of a poor community in Bombay.

NICK HEDGES

Traitor!

Who would have thought what the consequences of uttering the word '*ambiance*' might be? **Alan Hughes** describes the anguish that comes with the class system in Britain.

THE CHARM OF BRITAIN has always been the ease with which one can move into the middle class – Margaret Thatcher

'COME on you lot, I wanna gettoff 'ome tonight.'

My Uncle Ken, his sons Stephen and Andy and myself were lingering in the huge upper tier of the Holte End at Aston Villa Football Club, Birmingham. I'd travelled up that day from Oxford for the last home game of the season. It was strange going back to my working-class roots, to the world where I once worked in a Dudley factory as a sheetmetal worker.

In Oxford, where I've lived and worked for the past 11 years, things are very different. There I'm a graphic designer and purportedly middle class. Still, sitting here with my relatives in the warm late-May sunshine felt good. Like going home.

We were reluctant to leave the ground, choosing instead to soak up the end-of-season atmosphere. In mock despair a steward was imploring us to vacate the now-almost-empty stadium, which only moments before had been awash in a sea of claret and blue, the club colours.

'It's okay,' I replied to the impatient, grey-haired man dressed in a violently luminous orange waistcoat, 'we're just taking in the *ambiance*'.

I couldn't believe it. I just said it. The word came out of my mouth, italicized for emphasis, as though I had no control over it. I groaned inwardly. He looked at me as if I was from another planet.

'Am you takin' the piss, mate?' he queried, now more menacingly.

'No honest, I...' my voice trailed off as I looked round to see my relatives staring at me in disbelief.

'Listen to 'im, 'e talks posh, don't 'e?' Stephen said in his broad Black Country accent. Ken and Andy nodded in agreement, with expressions on their faces that suggested they'd lost me to some strange religious sect.

We left the stadium in a shroud of awkward silence that was only broken when news came through that one of Villa's rivals had lost. The mood lightened but the damage had been done. Somehow, that single word had condemned me as a class traitor. But what did that mean? Who, or what, was I betraying?

We joined a jubilant throng of Villa supporters in a pub close to the ground. The talk was of football. Shouting above the din I changed the subject.

'So you think I'm posh, do you Ste'?' I asked, somewhat nervously.

As I spoke I noticed his huge hands were splattered with dried paint of differing hues. Ken had been a painter and decorator all his working life and his sons had joined him when they left school.

'Well, you've lost your accent for a start, ain't yer?' returned Stephen.

We managed to grab an empty table while Ken and Andy headed for the bar and were soon swallowed up by the raucous crowd. I wondered if I'd ever see them again.

'Yes, I suppose I have,' I answered defensively, 'but I live in a different world now'.

'Ya mean, with the middle class.'

'Yes, and I have to be able to communi-

CHRIS DONAGHUE PHOTOGRAPHY / THE OXFORD PHOTO LIBRARY

cate with them. Having an almost unintelligible accent would make that impossible.'

'So they wouldn't understand me?'

'Well...'

'I'm as good as them.'

'I know, I'm just saying...'

Somebody bumped into us and a portion of his beer ended up on my trouser leg. By now the pub resembled the inside of a claret-and-blue sardine can. The walls vibrated as a hundred voices smote the air with repeated choruses of inane chanting. I began again.

'I suppose, what I'm saying is, well, the two worlds are very different.'

'Per'aps they am, but they think they'm betta than us, don't they?'

I feel I'm stuck somewhere between the two classes and in some ways I hate it, you know, not feeling I belong anywhere

'I suppose some of them do, yes.'

'An' what about you, what do you think?'

'I'm in the middle...'

'Ya mean, middle class?'

'No, er, yes. I mean, it's complicated. Oh, fuck knows.'

Ken and Andy returned from their expedition to the bar. Beer spilled everywhere as they plonked down a quartet of pints and several packets of crisps. I rubbed at the wet patch on my trouser leg. It felt uncomfortable.

'What yer talkin' about?' asked Ken as he sat down.

'Fuckin' clever types who think they'm betta than us,' answered Stephen as he picked up his pint. Leaning forward he took several huge gulps, emptying almost half the glass in an instant. I opened a packet of crisps, grabbed a handful and handed the packet round.

'They're not all like that...'

'Am you like them?'

'*They* say I am. I mean, I have a degree. I work in a profession. I go to dinner parties and drink Beaujolais. And I talk "posh". I suppose that makes me like them.'

'An' what am *we* like, then?'

'Well, you're supposed to be thick, inarticulate and pig-out on a diet of junk food and tabloid TV.'

'Ya see, they think they'm superior to us.'

'Of course they're not, but they do have advantages.'

'Like what?'

'Education for a start. They'll go to any lengths to make sure their kids get a good one. And most of them are left money or property by parents or relatives so they're always one step ahead of the rest. To be honest, I reckon whatever happens to them, they always come up smelling of roses.'

'So what happens to us. Do we always get the worst of it?'

'Well, who's gonna leave us pots of money? And besides, the education system is geared to cream off the smartest. There's never any time to let the others catch up and develop their talents. When I left school in 1963, at the age of 15, most of us were herded into factories, diploma-less and almost fucking brainless.'

'It's like that today, ain't it?'

'Yeh, except nowadays working-class kids queue up on the dole. So nothing has really changed. The status quo remains intact.'

'That's a pop group,' observed Andy with a mischievous glint in his eye.

'Very funny.'

'But *you* managed to move out, eh? You left the factory and left us behind,' continued Stephen, ignoring his brother's attempt at humour.

'I was lucky I suppose. But does that make me a class traitor?'

'What do you think?'

'I don't know. That's the honest answer. I feel I'm stuck somewhere between the two classes and in some ways I hate it, you know, not feeling I belong anywhere. But it's what I wanted. And I wanted it so badly I burned bridges. In my rush to get away I wanted to deny my past, even the way I spoke. I still feel bad about that. Guilty, I suppose. And yet...'

Just then a muscular, lanky youth, sporting a haircut from a Nuremberg rally and a cavernous mouth that lacked several front teeth, slapped Stephen on his back with such force that my relative and his chair were projected several centimetres forward. A bout of male banter ensued. I leaned back, supped at my beer and contemplated our conversation. Those words kept coming back to me. Traitor. Betrayal. Guilt. What did it all mean? What was so bad about my previous life? Why did I want my new one so badly?

I was certainly contemptuous of many of the people I worked with in the factory. I was appalled by their apathy and apparent willingness to settle for the cheap dreams offered by consumerism. I hated the way anything regarded as intellectual was derided. And the renowned philistinism prevalent amongst the uglier sections of the working class is still being proclaimed a virtue. It isn't clever to boast about not being clever.

I wanted, and still want, them to see that knowledge is power. That failure does not have to be their fate, and waiting to win the lottery will never get them, or the rest of us, anywhere. As John Lennon said, they are living someone else's dream, it's not even their own.

Well, I certainly had no allegiance to all that. So when I say I'm proud to be working class, what am I proud of?

I'm proud to be descended from the millions of women, men and children who sweated blood in the world's factories, shipyards and mines, and from the workers who fought and died for a better world. I'm proud of the old working-class sense of community and decency that seems to have long since vanished.

But whatever the reason, I wanted out. I craved the world of the intellectual and progressive. I read books, got myself politicized and eventually, through the auspices of what was left of the welfare state, went to college. I gained a degree and eventually moved to the city of dreaming spires. But when I got there I didn't fit in. There were new rules to learn, new games to play.

The midday meal changed from working-class dinner to middle-class lunch. Fish fingers metamorphosed into smoked salmon and people threw snippets of French into their conversation. *Dis donc!*

'Well, I'll tell yer...' said Stephen, his friend now creating havoc at the next table. Stephen motioned Andy for another pint. It was Andy's round. He gathered the now-empty glasses, turned, took a deep breath then headed in the general direction of the bar and vanished once more into the noisy mass of bodies. '...all I know is that we are still here and still being shat on from a great height. But no fuckin' smart arse is gonna tell me what to do.' He banged the table with his fist.

I looked at Ken. He winked. He adored his sons. They adored him.

Perhaps that's it. Perhaps I'm riddled with guilt at creating a sort of success and leaving behind family and friends to sink or swim in the free-market nightmare of Nineties Britain. And, for all my confusion, do I feel guilty because I actually *enjoy* quite a lot of my new life?

'My God, I've got middle-class angst!'

'What?' said Stephen looking surprised at my outburst.

'Oh, nothing. Just thinking out loud.'

Suddenly the conversation dried up. I chomped on a handful of crisps and listened to the communal singing that had continued unabated. I surveyed the scene. It was depressingly male-dominated; all tattooed arms, farting, belching and gross, lager-bloated stomachs. Somebody close to our table was re-acquainting himself with his breakfast. This didn't feel like home. I wasn't proud of this. But did Oxford really feel any better?

My position in the scheme of things – in the middle, as it were – might cause me some unease but it does allow me to straddle the two worlds, taking metaphorical temperature readings. I feel like a kind of cultural anthropologist; observing, taking notes. And as I flit from one to the other what I see is disturbing.

I see the gap widening between each group, both becoming more wary and distrustful of the other. The stereotypes remain stubbornly intact. I see scared people scrambling to compete for a slice of an ever-decreasing economic pie.

I see the working class; low-achieving, lacking confidence, willingly accepting their fate, destructively turning in on themselves; drug abuse, crime and violence. Or turning outwards, looking for scapegoats; black people, women, Jews, lesbians and gay men. Easy targets for the panic-stricken. And then, with money they don't have, they embark on an orgy of spending, being conned into buying anything they see.

I see an increasingly nervous middle class with their traditional values of hard work and thrift under threat. The spectre of unemployment and insecurity now hangs over them and they are more than willing to pull up the ladder on the masses below. Still insisting there's no such thing as class, their acclaimed bonhomie has become an intolerant scowl.

As for me? I continue to live in my cultural limbo land – feeling guilt at betraying what remains of the struggle for working-class emancipation, then thanking God I'm not there any more; still reacting to middle-class cerebral intimidation and thanking God I'm here, reading my books, visiting the opera and drinking good wine.

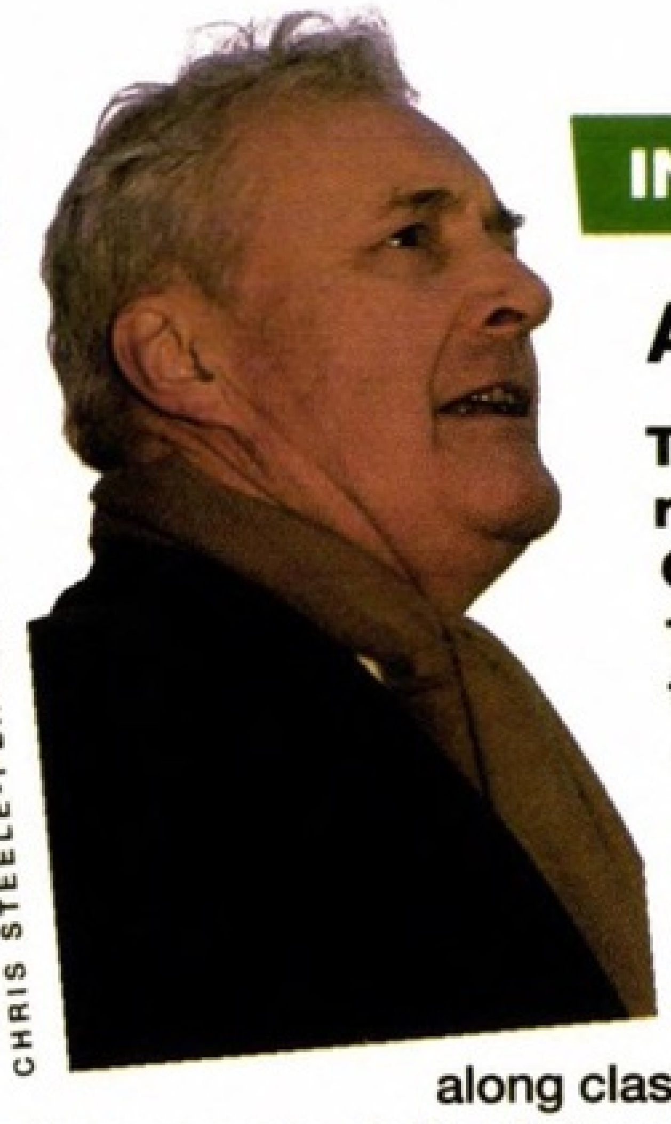
'Perhaps you're *truly* classless?' said Stephen, as though he'd been reading my thoughts.

'My God, perhaps I am...'

He then winked at his dad, looked back at me and smiled warmly.

'But don't worry Al, whatever you are, we still love ya.' ■

Alan Hughes has been a graphic designer at the **New Internationalist** for 11 years.



CHRIS STEELE-PERKINS / MAGNUM

INTERVIEW WITH TONY BENN

A MAP OF THE WORLD

Tony Benn has been an inspirational voice of the radical left in Britain since the end of the last Labour Government – in which he was a cabinet minister – in 1979, and is currently MP for Chesterfield. He talked to Alan Hughes about his own history and the class system.

AH: There's this notion that the class system doesn't exist anymore.

TB: Well I think if you analyze it historically, until Marx came along class was natural: 'God bless the squire and his relations and keep us in our proper station.' People talked about it. There was the aristocracy, I don't know if they talked much about the middle class. There was the working class. Everybody just accepted that. That was life.

Now funnily enough class is coming back, but [with] a redefinition of class, that everyone is middle class. And it is a dominant thing. In the Third World a huge, new, low-paid, non-union working class is being built up in the Tiger economies. The export of production to low-wage countries has taken the industrial working class to some extent out of this country.

So until you understand class you don't know what's going on. I mean it's a map. Before the labour and trade-union movement was organized the working class were the 'mob'. Then when it was organized it became the 'movement'. And now they've destroyed working-class organizations by legislation and unemployment it's the 'mob' again. Groups of people going around, teenagers stabbing people. Because if you don't organize the working class then they can easily be represented as mob-rule with their protest and violence. It is potentially extremely dangerous, because if this develops then you end up with fascism. Only fascism is strong enough to deal with the mob in the interests of wealth.

AH: What of this claim, that came out of Thatcherism, that we've evened out?

TB: There is a common culture developing to some extent. But of course deprivation is getting worse. I sit in my surgery every week in Chesterfield and whereas when I was first elected it was a matter of clearing up a few little bureaucratic hiccups in the welfare state, now people come and burst into tears; they can't manage, they can't live on the money, they're homeless, they're single-parent mums. It's like being a stretcher-bearer at the bloody battle of the Somme.

What we need is more confidence and organization among people to improve their own conditions by their own efforts and not wait for some kind, liberal-minded politician to do it for you. Do it yourself, and if you do the whole establishment crumbles. They can't survive against pressure. The more you press, the more they retreat. The more you capitulate, the more they advance.

And that is the thing that we have forgotten in the spectator politics of a modern democracy, where it's all the sound-bite of the spin doctor on the telly and you sit at home and watch it and that is what's called democracy. Democracy is what we do, it's not what they do to us. The more I think about it, the more I think it is really an attack on democracy, because democracy empowers the working class .

AH: Do you think that a truly classless world is possible?

TB: Well, Marx talked about a classless society, and then Major talks about a classless society, doesn't he? I mean it's absolutely absurd. But the fact that they still have to regard it as a desirable objective to get re-elected is an indication of the vitality of it. Major's idea of the classless society is that the honours list is modified. But actually it's still there. While politicians still have to use the idea of a classless society to show how democratic they are, they must sense that there is a desire for it.

AH: How do you see yourself in terms of class?

TB: Oh, my class origin? My grandfather went to work at the age of 11 as an office boy and ended up as a member of the London County Council. My dad was born in the East End of London and was made a peer at the end of his life, after being in the House of Commons for years, and I came up with a middle-class background.

It isn't so much your origins, it's who you work for. I think that's true about socialism. Socialism isn't a test of ideological purity. Socialism is tested very simply when there's a miners' strike, a printers' strike – whose side are you on? And so in a sense origins don't matter. It's who you work for, who you support. That's what it's all about. I think that idea of personal class shift is quite irrelevant. It's a question of when the miners are on strike – do you support the miners?

Language is a very important part of this. Globalization is being described as if it were the same as internationalism. Globalization and internationalism are quite different. Globalization is simply the overthrow of the world by capitalism, but internationalism is the working class getting together to improve their conditions.

Manifesto for the **millennium**

A MAP OF THE **WORLD** that does not include **Utopia** is not **worth** even **glancing** at, for it leaves out the **one country** at which **Humanity** is **always landing** – OSCAR WILDE

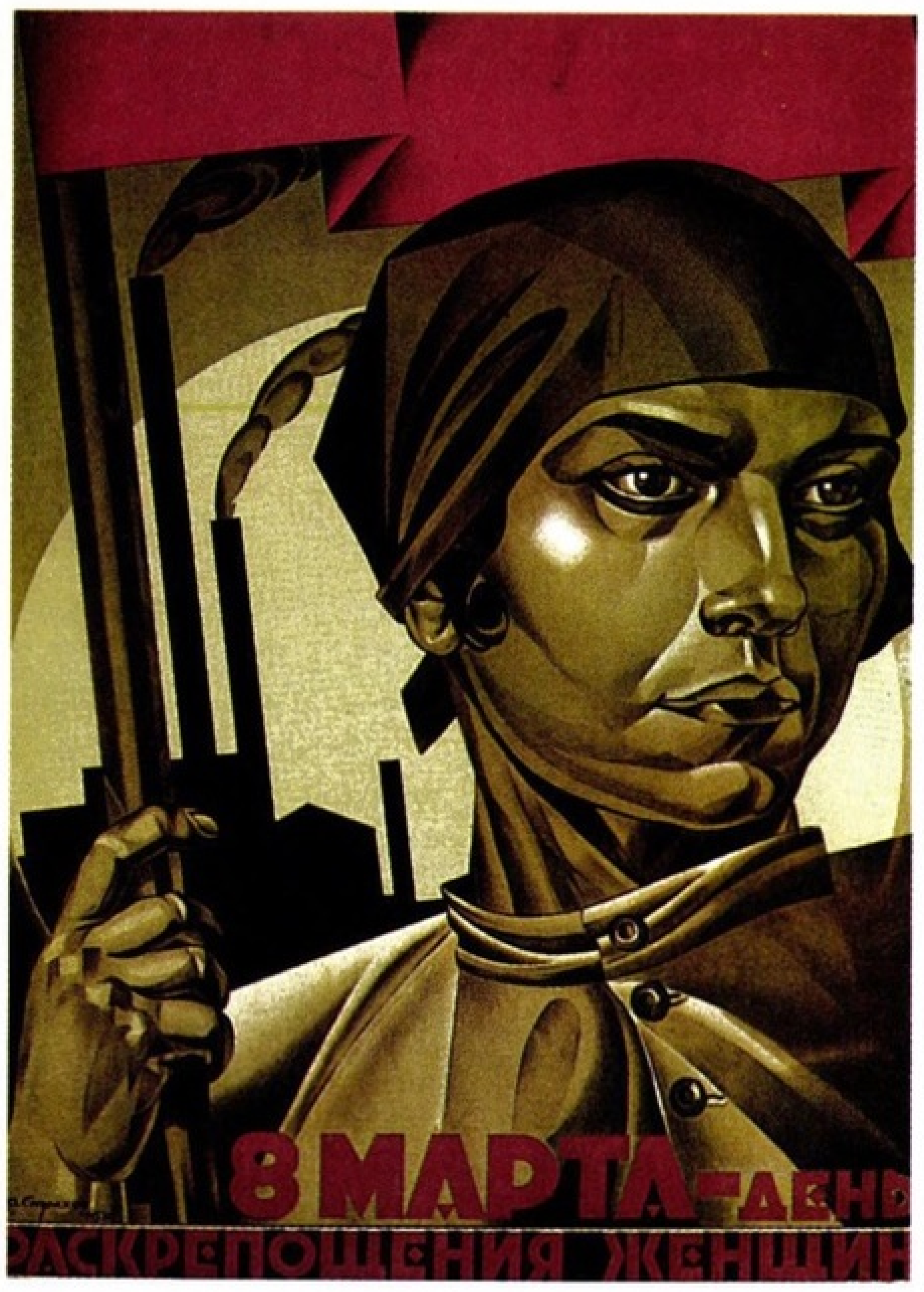
IN A CLASSLESS SOCIETY:

- The land will be owned by those who live on it
- Industry will be owned by those who work in it
- Homes will be owned by those who live in them
- Schools will be owned by those who value education
- Hospitals will be owned by those who value health
- Stores will be owned by those who shop in them
- The Internet will be owned by those who surf
- Patents – and motorcars – will be owned by no-one
- The Earth will be inherited by everyone

THE CLASSLESS SOCIETY

For as long as there have been classes there have been rebellions – from Spartacus and the slaves in Roman times to the Peasants' Revolt in medieval England and the revolutions in France, Russia, China or Cuba. People simply will not put up with oppression for ever. But what is the alternative? Can we imagine a classless society in the next millennium? Many people cannot. Here are some of the familiar objections they raise, and the answers they might be given by those of us who can.

MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

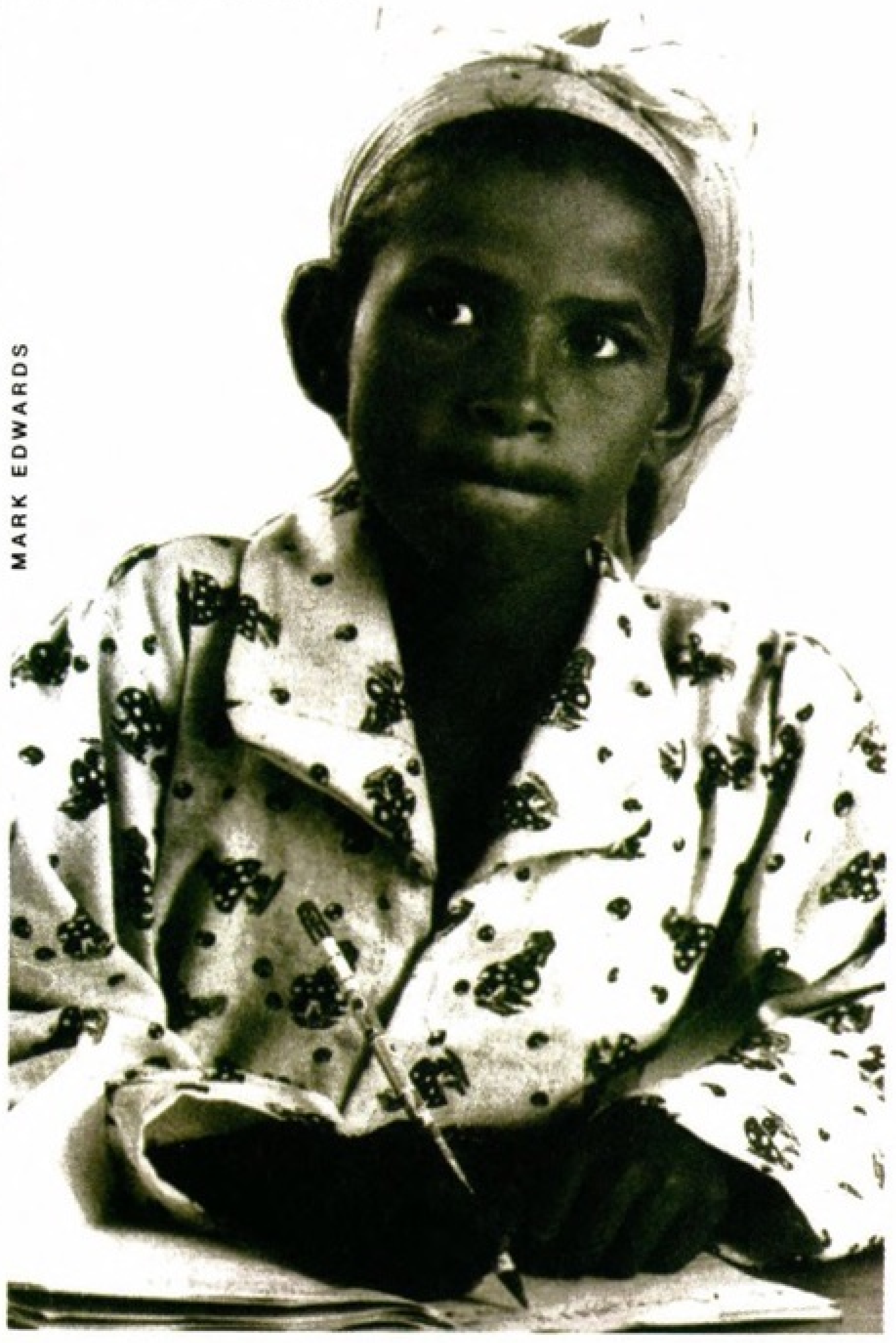


'IT'S BEEN TRIED BEFORE AND IT FAILED.'

You mean the collapse of **Communism** and 'the end of history'. Well, Soviet Russia and its satellites were never classless societies, and they didn't even try very hard to be so: the rulers lived incredibly privileged lives and wielded immense personal power. They claimed that they wanted to overthrow capitalism but ended up trying to copy it. So now the old ruling classes have slipped effortlessly into the role of rulers in 'free-market' societies. There have never been genuinely 'classless' societies – one good reason, you might think, why there never will be. The point about Utopia, however, is to travel rather than to arrive – as 'the end of history' theorists like to hope we already have.

'EVERYONE'S DIFFERENT. YOU WANT TO MAKE US ALL THE SAME.'

Yes, we are different – and yes, we are all the same! Equality would not mean we'd become identical. Quite the reverse: in a classless society our distinctiveness as individuals would be equally valued and we'd be better able to celebrate it. **Education** is the crucial issue here. Free education of equal quality for all is fundamental to a classless society. It can then begin to serve its real function: to 'bring out' the natural talents of everyone. Education in class-based societies is wasteful of talent and teaches most children to devalue themselves so that they will fit in. It's hard to imagine anything more pernicious than this. In a classless society the education of privilege will be an anachronism.



MARK EDWARDS

'THERE WOULDN'T BE ANY INCENTIVES.'

Incentives to do what? Since many millions of people have no job at all, free-market economics hardly provide a perfect motive. In any case, we need to rethink the nature of **work** for the next century, because there will be less of it around. The only jobs that cannot be replaced by machines are the 'caring' ones based on relationships between people – like bringing up children – and these will be revalued. We have to ask: 'What are we working for?' Developing new relationships with our environment and with each other as social beings on a lonely planet is a far more creative and exacting 'incentive' than mere material wealth.

'THE MAJORITY IS USUALLY WRONG.'

Sometimes, yes – and those of us who dream of a classless society are in a minority at the moment, so we're in a good position to know! The point is that the **human rights** of minorities, and genuine freedom, can only be guaranteed by the majority. Their protection depends upon equity between all people, when justice is no longer a commodity to be bought by those who can afford it.

'WE'D JUST BE RULED BY BUREAUCRATS.'

You mean, we aren't already? The struggle for real **democracy** will continue. Casting a vote once in a while for someone with the money or influence to seek election isn't good enough. We have responsibilities as well as rights. We have to challenge the immense, unaccountable power of states and corporations. The answer will be to take control at local level, and to develop closer links between groups in 'civil society' across national and continental boundaries – 'think globally, act locally' remains the slogan for the next century. Meanwhile, proportional representation can begin to transform barren 'party' politics that offers no real options at all.

JOHNSON / LIAISON

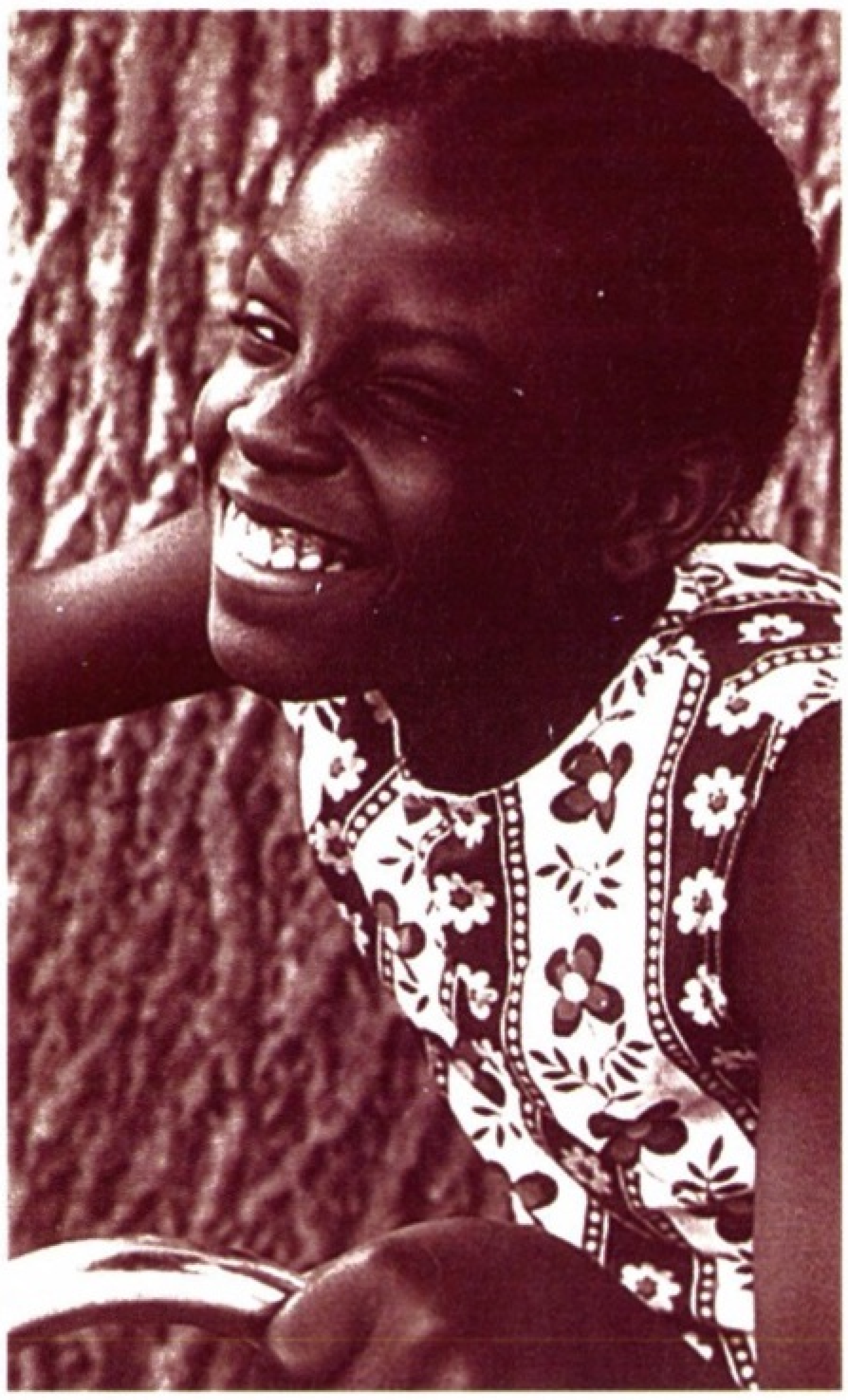
'THERE HAS TO BE SOME WAY TO RATION SCARCE RESOURCES.'

The really scarce resource is our **environment**. We can now see the limits to economic growth quite clearly, and we have a choice. The free market allocates limitless resources to those with the wealth and power to acquire them. As resources become more scarce, so will the people who can consume them to excess – or else the Earth will become uninhabitable. Terrible conflict and eventual disaster would then be inescapable. Classless societies, which set human needs above market forces, can face the environmental challenge more rationally and confidently.

MELANIE FRIEND

'WE'D ALL BE EQUALLY POOR.'

The impoverishment of the majority of the world's people is indeed the most urgent problem of all. But greater equality enriches everyone. This is a practical as well as a moral issue. Take **healthcare**. Virtually all the improvements in general health have come about because of shared benefits – like better sanitation or improved housing conditions. As the wealth gap widens the diseases of poverty, like TB and malaria, return. In classless societies research and resources would be devoted to healthcare freely available to all, rather than to hugely expensive treatments designed eventually to make the ruling class immortal.



ERIC L WHEATER

'RACE AND GENDER ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN CLASS.'

They all matter equally. No form of oppression is worse than any other. A 'classless' society may not guarantee **liberation** – but liberation does not guarantee that the oppressed will not become the oppressors. Liberation struggles have done most to change the world for the better in recent years, but the class struggles of earlier generations did most before that. This history belongs to us all. We can reclaim it together.

J HAWKINS / OXFAM

Sara Chamberlain reports on the giant sweatshops of Central America, where fresh solutions to fearful challenges are being worked out.

The female face of the proletariat

Frosted Lucky Charms (so magically delicious!), Lion King T-shirts and Pocahantas mugs – whatever your consumer heart desires is abundantly available in shopping malls around the world. With all these products on offer, the industrial proletariat can't have vanished entirely; it must have its nose to the grindstone, working overtime, doubletime, *somewhere*....

Sure enough, behind the magical materialization of ready-made Levi jeans and baby GAP rompers lie the Export Processing Zones of Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, where an overwhelmingly young and female industrial working-class spends 12 hours a day churning out brand-name products in inhumane working conditions for seven dollars a week.

> ***TNCs hire women because they are more 'nimble with their fingers' than men and because... sewing is 'women's***

Maquillas (from the Spanish *maquillar*, 'to make up') are the giant sweatshops of the global economy, where foreign-owned companies or domestic subcontractors employ armies of poor women to assemble goods for export. Most maquillas offer transnational corporations (TNCs) tax holidays and export subsidies, free them from trade barriers and import duties on raw materials, and provide subsidized utilities and infrastructure such as roads and warehouses, built at public expense. Because of these benefits and cheap labor, TNCs make vast profits. In both El Salvador and Guatemala, the number of maquilla workers grew from 3,500 to 50,000 between 1985 and 1994, while apparel exports in Central America jumped from $1 million to $300 million.

Between 50 and 90 per cent of the workers assembling garments, toys, shoes, cigarettes, or electronics in Central America's maquillas are women between the ages of 14 and 25. According to Lydia, a former union organizer now living in the US: 'Factory conditions are unsanitary. There's no ventilation and the washrooms have no running water. Accidents occur frequently and the owners refuse to provide medical coverage.' The US/Guatemala Labor Education Project adds that the maquilla system has 'workers beaten for not meeting production goals, imposes mandatory overtime without pay (often locking workers in the factories until they finish an order, sometimes overnight), and withholds wages.'

Many of the rights that maquilla managements violate are gender-specific. Jacaranda Fernandez, a member of the Nicaraguan trade union FETSALUD, says that most maquillas will only hire women who can prove with a medical certificate that they are not pregnant, give birth-control pills or contraceptive injections to their female workers, and punch women in the stomach or sack them if they get pregnant – all because they don't want to pay maternity leave. Women workers are also sexually harassed by their male overseers. An unofficial 'lay down or get laid off' policy operates in many maquillas.

Why do working-class women in Central America put up with these conditions? Because a maquilla job is better than no job. In a region where unemployment is often above 50 per cent and the UN estimates that 70 per cent of the total population lives in poverty, competition is fierce. TNCs claim they hire women because they're more 'nimble with their fingers' than men and because, according to the garment industry, sewing is 'women's work'. In fact TNCs hire women because they think they are less likely to unionize, and because around the world and throughout history, women have been paid less than men.

In 1990 the US magazine *Bobbin* advertised the benefits of investing in the maquilla industry in El Salvador: 'Rosa Martinez produces apparel for US markets on her sewing machine in El Salvador. You can hire her for 57 cents an hour. Rosa is more than just colorful. She and her co-workers are known for their industriousness, reliability and quick learning.' According to the Central American Human Rights Committee, the same advertisement appeared again a year later, with one crucial difference: Rosa's wage-rate had dropped to 33 cents an hour.

Minimum wages continue to be cut by Central American governments desperately competing with each other to attract foreign investment. TNCs justify their exploitation of women by arguing that they are secondary wage earners supported by husbands, who are the 'real breadwinners'. In reality, many married women now have to support their unemployed husbands, and 40 per cent of women in the maquilla sector are single mothers.

Dangerous place

Women's work is also cheapened by preventing them from organizing. Central America is currently one of the most dangerous places in the world to join a trade union. Lydia, a former Salvadorian union organizer now living in the US, states that: 'There were constant threats against our union leaders. We were all put under surveillance. People were taken from their homes and found a few days later, brutally tortured. One worker from my union was taken away and three days later we found him dead. His jaws had been separated and his face completely disfigured.'

Maquilla workers have great difficulty organizing precisely because, as women, they often lack the support of their male family members, and the male-dominated unions. TNCs capitalize on the fact that in many Central American societies it is considered 'un-feminine,' and 'improper' for women to challenge male authority in public. Women maquilla workers are frequently discouraged from joining trade unions by male relatives: 'There have been severe problems, even divorces, because of this,' says Francesca Romero, officer of the Union of Social Security Institute Workers in Mexico. 'Sometimes it bothers a man when his wife is out fighting for a cause, going outside the home more often and spending her days on strike. He's used to being served and taken care of, so he starts to protest.'

Trade unions – not only in Central America but around the world – reflect the bias of their predominantly male membership. Many male trade unionists don't see women as 'real' workers because, like the TNCs, they think they'll eventually get married and stop working, and also because they see their demands for benefits like childcare and maternity leave as women's needs, not workers' rights.

However, trade unionists of both sexes are beginning to realize that unions will never be effective if they ignore half the work force. New, unconventional methods must be used if the 'feminized' working classes are to organize. Unionists are discovering that mobilizing on the factory floor frequently ends in dismissal and distrust of labor unions. Working in the community, on the other hand, creates a more secure, unified base from which to voice demands. In order to do this, unionists have had to develop relationships with local women's organizations and religious groups that are more in touch with the needs and strengths of the community. 'The tremendous mobility among maquilla workers and the exhaustion caused by the double day make it very difficult to organize among these women. That's why we feel we can work better in the neighborhoods. Women feel strongly connected to their communities, and they are supported by being able to be close to their families... Women don't compartmentalize the world. They integrate their work lives with their home lives,' said Union member Gloria Tello.

The old adage, 'workers of the world unite' is fast becoming the 'rice and beans' of trade unionizing

However, because of the extraordinary mobility of corporations and capital – managements immediately threaten to relocate if unions succeed – very few union initiatives are effective without international support. The old adage, 'workers of the world unite' is fast becoming the 'rice and beans' of trade unionizing.

Multinational networks involving labor, women's, environmental and anti-poverty groups, social-justice coalitions, health and safety centers, are being developed.

Consumers can also play a large role in these campaigns, because by boycotting goods manufactured in the maquillas they can help force giant corporations to the bargaining table. GAP was forced to improve labor conditions in a Korean-owned maquilla that assembled its clothes in El Salvador, thanks to pressure from international trade organizations, religious groups and consumers. During the first half of 1995 the Mandarin maquilla fired 771 workers simply for organizing a union. Among those fired – and then blacklisted – were the entire elected board of directors of the union, and 63 pregnant women.

The campaign, co-ordinated by the New York-based National Labor Committee,

CLASS OF '96 – AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

WORLDS APART

Nadia Rapihana is 16 years old. Her home is a three-bedroomed state house and she goes to Nga Tapuwae College in Mangere, South Auckland, where only two of the 570 pupils are Paheka, or white.

'MOST OF THE KIDS ROUND HERE STRUGGLE A LOT,' says Nadia, 'when it comes to buying their uniforms and paying their fares. You get some kids, when you say "Mangere", they say "Oh, that place!", they really put it down. But I think it's quite a nice place. Homely. I think they think we might be street kids. But I really like it anyway.'

Nadia has little or no idea of what life would be like on the other side of the Harbour Bridge. Nadia is, however, involved in a cultural-exchange programme which takes her for three months across the bridge to the middle-class Paheka suburb of Tacapuna, and to the private, Catholic, Carmel College.

'Before I came here I thought it was going to be snobby,' she says, straight after the move. 'But it's not. It's just loud. They talk too much.' One difference that strikes her immediately is in the food. 'Here we have, like, rabbit food, vegetarian food, always vegetables and always greens, and I hate greens!' At Carmel College all the children take packed lunches; at Nga Tapuwae College no-one does.

During the exchange she lives with a family in a smart home near the Tacapuna beach, returning to Mangere at weekends. After she's been on the exchange for a while she begins to reflect on the real differences between the children:

'I don't think they realize how lucky they are,' she says of the Carmel College students. 'Half of them are driving cars and they just throw money around, buying heaps of flash clothes. The kids over here are struggling to get things and wishing they had things. They want more but they know they can't get it. The kids on the [Tacapuna] shore, they take what they've got but they want more and they get more, because they've got a lot of money.' And, when it's over and she's back in Mangere for good, she says: 'I thought it was worlds apart. It has changed me, made me go for my goals. I feel most comfortable for school at Carmel. But I live here.'

From *How the Other Half Lives,* a film made for TV by **Robyn Scott-Vincent Productions.**

was such an embarrassment to GAP that it suspended its contract with Mandarin. This put the jobs of every Mandarin employee in jeopardy. The campaigners responded by demanding that GAP take responsibility for how its clothes were manufactured, instead of running away from the problem. Consumer support for the campaign eventually forced GAP to renew its contract with Mandarin, and made them agree to a face-to-face meeting with the locked-out union leaders and allow immediate monitoring of factory conditions by El Salvador's Human Rights Advocate.

The main stumbling block for 'solidarity without borders' is nationalist racism, which brings us to industrial job losses in the North. Kalima Rose of San Francisco-based Equal Means states: 'The recession in the US is deep and people are scared, because they see factories closing all around. When their own plant closes and then reopens in Mexico at four dollars a day, they don't get mad at the company or the government but at Mexican workers.' Corporations are actively stirring up racist sentiments by pushing for concessions from labor and blaming it on international competition.

One of the solutions to nationalist racism is to increase North-South communication, understanding and co-operation. The UK-based Unison is working towards this goal by 'twinning' with trade unions in Central America. There are also experiments with international trade-union conferences and workshops, union-member exchange schemes and training for women.

If workers cannot see beyond their national borders, then what journalists Viky Villanueva and Rebeca Martinez describe as 'industrial human sacrifice', whereby 'the welfare of the very workers that make our world go round is subordinated to the cold and calculated quest for greater productivity, at whatever the cost', will continue unchecked. In Central America the Transnational's latest victims will be the new class of industrial working women. ■

Sara Chamberlain is a freelance journalist based in Oxford. She has just moved to England from San Francisco where she worked as a researcher and writer for Earth Island Institute's ReThink Paper Campaign.

Action

Central American Human Rights Committee (CAHRC)

Is an independent organization which promotes respect for the full range of human rights in Central America. CAHRC undertakes urgent actions in response to human-rights violations in the region, develops public-awareness initiatives in the UK, and lobbies to influence policies in the European Union and in the broader international community. CAHRC is especially active on behalf of labour unionists in Central America. For more information write to CAHRC, 83 Margaret Street, London WIN 7HB, England, or Tel: (44) 171 631 4200, or Fax: (44) 171 436 1129, or E-mail: cahrc@gn.apc.org

Clean Clothes Campaign

Aims to support the struggle of women workers in garment-producing units (factories, sweatshops, home-based industry) for improved working conditions in the South and North by making the European public more aware of their situation. For more information, visit the Clean Clothes Campaign on the internet: http://www.xs4all.nl/~ccc/ccc.htm

Clothes Code Campaign - Oxfam

Is challenging the top five British high-street clothes retailers to adopt a code of conduct which guarantees humane working conditions for the people who make our clothes. The campaign is primarily focusing on how garments are manufactured in Bangladesh for sale in the UK. Consumers can help Oxfam persuade Marks and Spencer, Next, Selfridges, Top Shop and C&A to ensure that their clothes are made in humane working conditions by handing in coupons that ask for the fair treatment of garment workers to these stores' sales assistants when you shop. To obtain coupons, or for more information about the Clothes Code Campaign, call the clothes line at: (44) 1865 312456, or visit the Clothes Code Campaign on the internet: http://www.oneworld.org/oxfam/

Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) and the **National Labour Committee (NLC)**

were instrumental in pressuring GAP to take responsibility for improving appalling working conditions, and for upholding human rights in the Korean-owned Mandarin maquilla factory that manufactures much of GAP's clothing in El Salvador. For more information contact CISPES, PO Box 1801, New York, NY 10059, US, or Tel: (1) 212 220-1290, or E-mail: cispesnatl@igc.apc.org

International Centre for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR)

Is the representative at world level of free labour organizations on all five continents. Established in 1949, it now has 174 affiliates, for the most part national trade union federations, with a total membership of 120 million. ICTUR has supported projects for trade-union women, with the help of development aid, in nearly 60 countries. ICTUR is currently asking for donations to help Guatemala union leader Reynold Gonzalez and his sister, who was abducted, raped, and tortured because of her brother's activities. To contact ICTUR write to Bld Emile Jacqmain, 155, B-1210 Brussels, or Tel: (32) 2 224 02 11, or fax: (32) 2 201 58 15.

Labour Behind the Label

Is a network of UK groups and organizations concerned about the pay, employment rights and health-and-safety conditions of workers in the international garment industry. Labour Behind the Label aims to draw attention to the plight of garment workers around the world, to campaign for the improvement of working conditions; to encourage retailers to extend their responsibility for workers in all stages of production, and to promote fair trade. For more information, contact Women Working Worldwide at CER, St Augustine's, Lower Chatham St, Manchester M15 6BY, England, or Tel: (44) 0161 247 1760, Fax: (44) 0161 247 6333, E-mail: MCR1:women-ww, or visit their internet site: women-ww@mcr1.poptel.org.uk

THE LABOUR
BEHIND THE LABEL

Maquilla Solidarity Network

Is a new initiative to promote solidarity between Canadian labour and social-movement groups and Mexican and Central American counterparts organizing to raise standards and improve conditions in maquiladora zones. The network supports innovative organizing strategies that connect community and workplace issues, and address health and environmental problems and the specific problems of women who form the bulk of the maquilladora work force. To join the network, write to 606 Shaw St, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6G 3L6, or Tel: (1) 416 532-8584, or fax: (1) 416 532-7688, or E-mail: perg@web.apc.org

Mujer a Mujer/Woman to Woman

Is a continental women's network focusing on the impact of free trade and restructuring on women, that is helping to build connections between garment-worker organizations in Canada, Mexico, the US and Central America. For more information, write to 606 Shaw St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6G 3L6 or Tel: (1) 416 532-8584, or fax: (1) 416 532-7688, or E-mail: perg@web.apc.org

US/Guatemala Labor Education Project

Involves US unions in corporate and government lobbying in the defence of Guatemalan maquilla workers' rights, US/GLEP was instrumental in supporting Philips-Van Heusen (a men's shirt retailer) workers' efforts to form a union. US/GLEP is currently asking for international support for Flor De Maria Salguero De Laparra, who was forcibly taken off a bus, drugged, beaten, and raped three times on 17 May 1995, because she was a union organizer in Guatemala's maquilla sector. To help support US/GLEP's efforts, write to ACTWU-Chicago Joint Board, 333 s. Ashland Ave, Chicago IL 60607, US, or Tel: (1) 312 262-6502, fax: (1) 312 262 6602, E-mail: usglep@igc.apc.org

Others

Latin American Information Centre, 76 Canning St, N Melbourne, VIC 3051 Tel: (3) 9326 9330 (Fridays only). **Latin American Cultural Centre**, 1 Bedford St, Newtown, NSW 2042, Australia, Tel: (2) 519 4874, Mondays and Wednesdays only, after 6.00pm. **Central American Welfare Information Centre**, PO Box 357 Flemington, VIC 3031, Tel/fax: (3) 9376 9404.

Trade Aid is currently engaged in a major campaign on conditions of bonded labour and child servitude. PO Box 35 049, Christchurch, Aotearoa/NZ, Tel: (3) 385 3535, Fax: (3) 385 3636, E-mail: tradeaid@chch.planet.co.nz

The **NI** Interview

Elizabeth Penashue

After decades of government paternalism the Innu people of Labrador are fighting to regain their land and their self-respect. **Wayne Ellwood** meets a soft-spoken woman with 22 grandchildren and a knack for organizing sit-ins.

In northern Labrador on the bleak, windswept coast of Voisey Bay prospectors have just confirmed the world's largest nickel deposit, a fabulously rich strike which mining moguls estimate will meet global demand for 30 years. But Elizabeth Penashue is not impressed. She is worried – worried that this new discovery will further disrupt the lives of her people, the 13,000 Innu who live in the sub-arctic lands in Northeast Quebec and Labrador. The Innu call this harsh region Nitassinan – 'our land'. But they are afraid both the land and their centuries-old culture are slipping from their grasp.

'This Voisey Bay, this is the big one,' says Elizabeth. Her words are slow but precise. Before the interview begins she apologizes for her halting English. But there's no mistaking the passion of her words.

'The government is talking about getting everything in there: an airport, a wharf for big boats, hotels, stores, houses. But no-one is asking what it will mean for the Innu people. Labrador is my land, Innu land, it's where I want to stay. We got to do something before it's too late.'

> ***Labrador is my land, Innu land, it's where I want to stay. We got to do something before it's too late***

The Innu have never ceded title to this part of Northeast Canada. Many take part in twice-yearly forays into the bush with their families to hunt and fish. For Elizabeth these excursions are essential to her people's survival.

'When we go into *nutshimit* (the bush) in fall and spring we are very happy there; it's not the same as in our village, Sheshatshiu. There I always worry about my kids. Maybe they're gonna spend all their time drinking or they're gonna commit suicide like so many of our young people have done. In the bush we teach them everything about animals, about hunting and medicine. And my kids and my grandkids they are all the time asking when we gonna go. We have to be the teacher of our children otherwise they're gonna lose everything about our culture.'

It wasn't until the early 1950s that the Innu felt the first real pressures to settle and halt their semi-nomadic lifestyle.

'The Government moved our people into houses. When I was young there were no schools, no hospitals, no houses. When we got our first house my mom said: "Oh, we gonna have water, we gonna have washing and a bath." She was happy. She didn't understand that was part of what the Government was doing to change the Innu.'

That change has been dramatic and the impact of modern society on traditional Innu culture devastating. Today alcoholism is endemic, teenage suicide rates are sky-high and family breakdowns common.

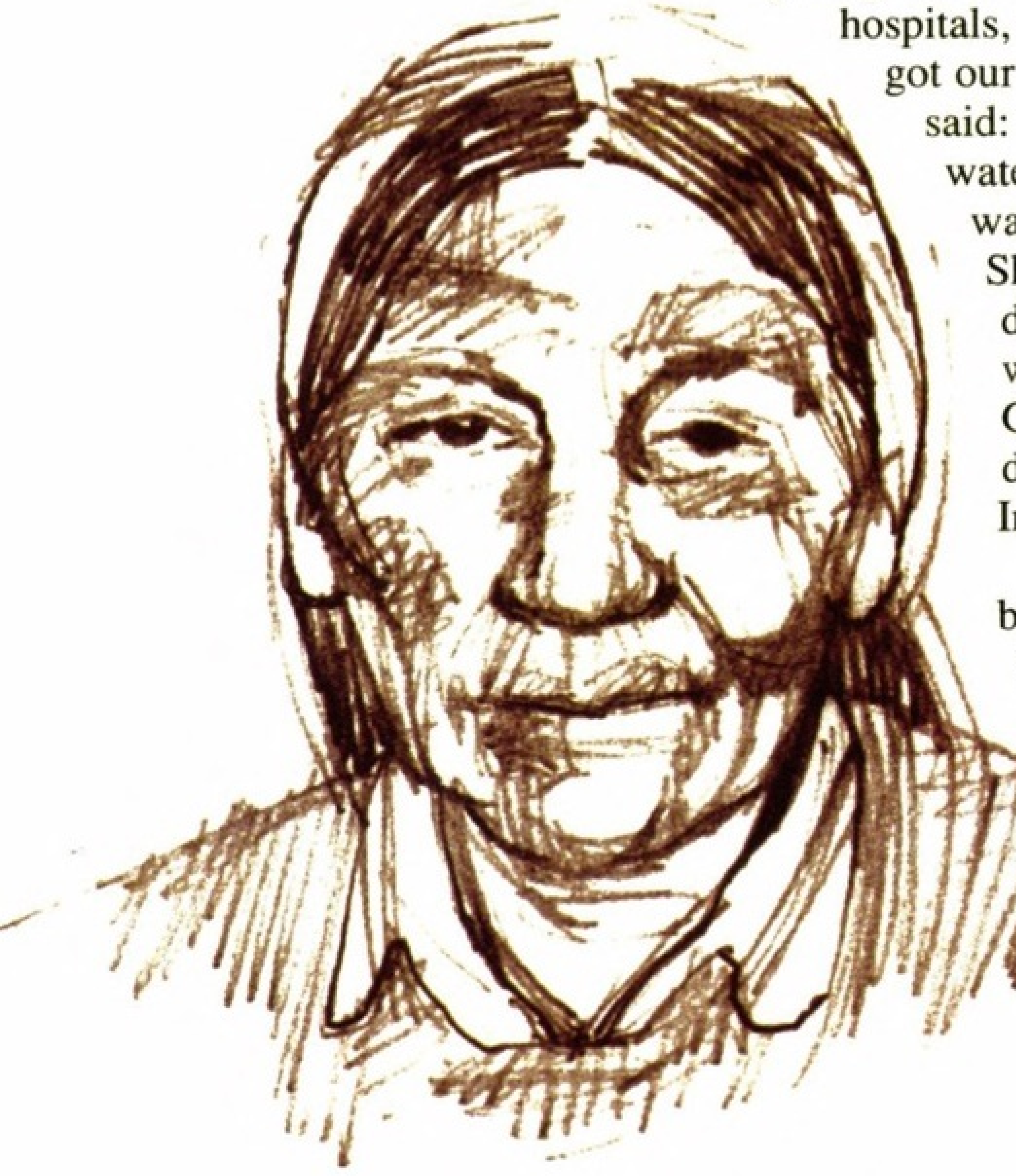


ILLUSTRATION BY ALAN HUGHES

'In the summer we used to live in tents along the ocean,' explains Elizabeth, 'we were always visiting, we shared fish or meat. Now we are always inside. Too much television and no more visits. It's sad. When people stayed in the bush we never had problems like diabetes or high blood pressure. We always ate fresh meat: caribou, porcupine, rabbits, partridge, beaver. Now we go to the store and get some eggs or canned food and we have lots of problems. Old people in the bush, even at 70 or 80, were always working, always happy. In Sheshatshiu today people sometimes die at 40.'

Since the early 1980s the Innu have been fighting yet another threat from the outside. The Canadian Government appropriated without compensation more than 100,000 square kilometres of Nitassinan to allow Canadian and foreign military jets to practise low-level flying. Canadian Airforce pilots, along with their British, Dutch and German counterparts, fly thousands of sorties a year at levels as low as 30 metres above the ground, mostly along river valleys and over lakes where the Innu travel and build their camps.

Elizabeth and others have protested for nearly ten years to stop the flights. They claim the ear-piercing noise of the screaming jets threatens wildlife populations and disrupts their traditional way of life. Despite the unresolved land claim both the Canadian and European governments continue to ignore Innu protests. Under terms of a recent deal the Canadian Government will allow 15,000 test flights a year, nearly triple the current number.

Elizabeth has organized dozens of peaceful sit-ins, mostly by women, on the runway at the air base in Goose Bay, Labrador. Small bands of protesters have also crossed into no-go areas which the military has designated as test bombing ranges. Elizabeth herself has been arrested half a dozen times but says stoically that the stakes are too high to give up now.

'The first time was five years ago,' she recalls. 'All us women had a meeting and decided to do something. Next morning over 100 people sat down on the runway – kids, women and even some men. We just sat there, we didn't make no trouble or break no planes. Then the RCMP (Mounties) dragged us away to a big bus and put us in jail.'

On a more recent protest she and 38 others were convicted of another runway sit-in to prevent Dutch pilots from taking off. After her release she went back to the base and was immediately re-arrested. 'My friends were still in jail,' she recounts with a smile. 'And when I walked back in they all got up and clapped.'

Elizabeth warns that the Innu's protests will continue until there is a full land-claim agreement. 'The Government never asked to use our land,' she says softly. 'And we never signed any paper saying they could. How many times do we have to say that's enough?'

Given the gold-rush mentality surrounding the Voisey Bay nickel discovery and the Government's reluctance to treat the Innu claim seriously, Elizabeth and her people will need all the support they can muster. ■

For further information on how you can help, especially if you live in Britain, Germany or Holland, please contact: Innu Nation, PO Box 119, Sheshatshiu, Labrador, Canada A0P 1M0, Tel: 709 497 8398, Fax: 709 497 8396

Reviews

music

Women's World Music

by **Various** (SDC/Cod Tuxedo 38040 CD)

COMPILATION ALBUMS serve two purposes: to stress a theme or to act as an entrée to a multiplicity of artists. **Women's World Music** manages to do both and its dexterity and sheer verve owes everything to its 16 artists. Originated by the Swiss Development Corporation (SDC), the album had the immediate purpose of publicizing the Beijing Women's Conference. The uptake in Switzerland alone encouraged the SDC to release worldwide. It's an excellent decision. While some of the artists – Angelique Kidjo, Celia Cruz and Miriam Makeba – are well distributed across the world, others are not and there are wonderful discoveries to be made. Cape Verde's barefoot diva Cesaria Evora, Algeria's Reinette l'Oranaise and Indian duo Sameera and Silander are simply unmissable. I defy anyone to listen to Evora's *Frutu Proibidu* and not rush out to order her solo albums – *La diva aux Pieds Nus* or *Miss Perfumad* are available on France's Lusafrica/Melodie label.

Women contribute considerably to indigenous music, but their work is often ignored in the music world's economy. Though the tracks on this album are firmly rooted in each singer's folk tradition, their subjects and moods are extremely varied indeed. A field-recording made in Tanzania by the Wakada Cultural Group warns against AIDS, Sainko Namchylak from Siberia delivers a haunting, sparse, eerie song from the Tanola nomad tradition; Puerto Rico's young and streetwise Chrissy sings a fresh, uplifting number with an anti-drugs message; while the lulling choruses of *Not Yet Uhuru* from South Africa's Letta Mbulu belie a sombre, more intangible, truth.

What unites all these tracks is a fierce sense of individual cultural identity, expressed in vibrant and emotional colours. It's not always important to know what a song is literally about because its mood is its own form of communication. *Yalla Chant* from Natacha Atlas – a London-based Moroccan singer – is a seductive upbeat blend of dance music, whereas Mercedes Sosa from Argentina lives in an emotional territory which is far darker. For all those songs which feature the kind of slick production that Western studios are capable of – like Kidjo's *Yonnoun* – there are other recordings which are all the more moving and somehow more vital for their minimal studio technique. Recorded live, Zap Mama's *Mon Grandpère* is a case in point; so too is Reinette l'Oranaise's *Kif Amali Ou Hilti* – a song that's both lovely and sad and all the richer for its studied lack of adornment.

Celebrating women's music: Angelique Kidjo.

As a celebration of women's music and of community, this album is highly recommended.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆☆ **LG**

books

The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me

by **Calixthe Beyala**
Translated from the French by Marjolijn de Jager (Heinemann, ISBN 0-435-90951-7)

Yaka

by **Pepetela**
Translated from the Portuguese by Marga Holness (Heinemann, ISBN 0-435-90962-2)

THE SLUM, A THRIVING and hive-like place, is witness to the extremes of human life. Over and over people survive or are broken by the same kinds of circumstances. Humming with life the slum may be, but it also has its own curious stasis. In **The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me** Cameroonian writer Calixthe Beyala plunges us into the stagnant world of the Quartier Général, where her protagonist, Ateba, strives for her own identity against the dictates of the moralistic and hypocritical aunt with whom she lodges.

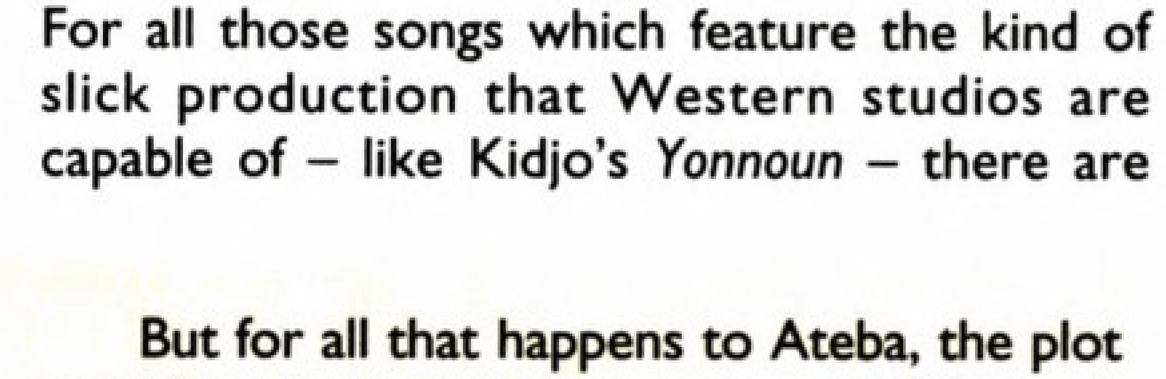
Things happen to Ateba – men's sticky and violent advances, their rage at their rejection; constant appraisal and disapproval from others. And yet Ateba, the abandoned daughter of a prostitute, finds her voice and rescues her own thoughts from the demands of her situation, building an identity upon pain.

But for all that happens to Ateba, the plot remains afloat: characters appear and then get abandoned and the significance of events is constantly shifting. Through all this routine change where nothing really changes, the narrative cuts out space for Ateba and for the shaping of her voice.

The main drawback of the novel is its over-evident poetry. Beyala seems at times to get swept away by the power of her own words and it all begins to sound grandiose and loud. This may be because it was translated from the French, a language which suffers 'poetic' writing more gladly.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆

YAKA IS A SAGA of tremendous scope, an Angolan *War and Peace* of sorts. It charts the destiny of the nation through the fortunes of its central character Alexandre Semedo, a child of Portuguese settlers, born under a tree in 1890. By its closing pages it is 1975 and the end of colonial domination.



In between Semedo founds a clan and through stories of his children and grandchildren, the tale of Angola's long battle for independence is told. Semedo is the perfect protagonist – ineffectual, doubting, knowing what's right, doing what's expedient.

The novel manages to get under the skin of the white settlers – a community of ex-convicts, political exiles and others not exactly welcome in the 'home' country of Portugal – united by their fear of blacks and their own rapacious greed. Semedo's family, like any large family, is riven by clashing ambitions and thwarted desires, and Alexandre watches as it is pulled apart.

The book's racial politics is excellent. Pepetela (Artur Carlos Mauricio Pestana) lets his white characters open their mouths and ironies and contradictions leap out. By focusing almost exclusively on the settlers, he is able to show their inhumanity first hand. The same ploy is less successful, however, with patriarchy – it ends up making the female characters seem less important.

The scope of the book is huge, its story complex and deeply satisfying. It is let down, however, by the amount of political discussion the characters engage in and the detailed working out of raids and attacks. Realistic this may be, gripping it's not. Despite this, it achieves the formidable goal of bringing Angola's bloody colonial past to life and illuminates the colonial mind.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆ **UP**

books

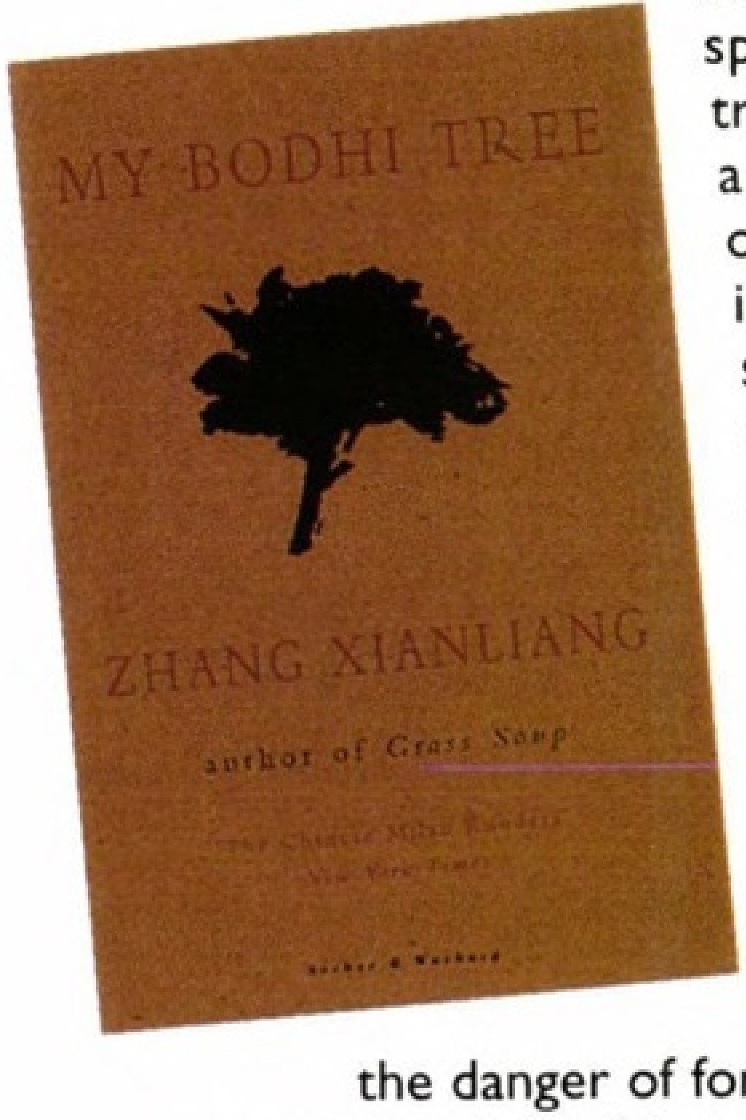
My Bodhi Tree

by **Zhang Xianliang**

(Secker and Warburg ISBN 0-436-203251-1)

In the last months of 1960 Mao's 'Great Leap Forward' pushed China into famine. Zhang Xianliang was incarcerated in a Chinese labour camp at the time. He managed to escape – only to return voluntarily on discovering the extent of the despair and suffering he found 'outside' in 'free' China. He reckoned, probably rightly, that his chances of survival were better as a convict.

Inside the camp the authorities ruled with a grim and inconsistent paternalism; the convicts were 'enemies' but also 'children who could be taught to mend their ways'. The approach was surreal: Central Government set impossible production targets from tiny areas of land; famished prisoners were forced to work more and eat less. Eager, thought-reforming intellectuals threw their remaining strength into obeying Beijing's orders to 'work bitterly hard' – and died like flies.



Zhang's description of daily prison camp life – hunting for cigarette ends, stealing potatoes, sleeping in a tiny space just 30 centimetres wide – personalizes an escalating horror otherwise almost incomprehensible in its scale. Thirty million Chinese starved to death in Mao's famine. **My Bodhi Tree** explains – amazingly readably – what it was like for one individual to teeter on the brink as those around him fell.

It warns too of the danger of forgetting – and repeating a period where 'the country went mad'. A remote danger? In the week that **My Bodhi Tree** was published, Amnesty International reported over 100,000 people still incarcerated in China's 're-education through labour' camps. It's a sharp reminder of why Zhang insists that his book is not just a testimony to the past, but a warning to the future.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ **RB**

STAR RATING

Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

Reviews by **Louise Gray**, **Urvi Patel** and **Roger Bingham**
Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

THE **CLASSIC**

The Spanish Earth

...being the film that set the standard for the cinema of international solidarity.

Audiences stood and cheered. Hands plunged into purses and pockets for one more donation. The issue was Spain and activists worldwide called it 'the good fight'. It was 1937 and people everywhere who craved news on the Spanish Civil War had waited anxiously to see Joris Ivens's **The Spanish Earth**. Most viewers had never heard of the Dutchman Ivens. They knew, however, that this was the film narrated and endorsed by Ernest Hemingway. They were not disappointed.

Mainstream newsreels, such as Hearst's *Movietone News*, had done a good job at shooting the war from Franco's side. Now here was visual proof of the barbarity at work in Franco's bombers, proof that Mussolini and Hitler were involved, and proof that the Spanish Republicans were prepared to fight back.

Hemingway's script and his dramatic yet measured voice added its own poetry and partisan anger to the powerful images.

The Spanish Civil War remains one the key events of the twentieth century. Along with Mussolini's 1936 invasion of Ethiopia, it formed the ominous prelude to Hitler's full-scale onslaught. It was on the one hand the lost cause that ushered in the fascist Franco's brutal 40-year regime; on the other a moving chapter of democratic and left-wing solidarity as thousands of volunteers joined International Brigades and gave their lives to help people in another country.

The Spanish Earth tells the story of Fuentiduena, a Republican village on the road between Valencia and Madrid, a key area during the three-year civil war. The film shows bombings and battles yet also lingers to observe actual people working, close-ups of faces, families and relationships. It's a political, emotionally rich essay linking themes of 'working the earth and fighting for the earth', said Ivens. Right from the opening images Ivens's editing strategy is to develop links between what he called the sensual, psychological and point-of-view elements, 'pulling the spectator by emotions, from stage to stage of an idea's development'.

Ivens was also trying a new form of political documentary, rejecting the conventional newsreel and the straight essay of intellectual argument. The result was something akin to the realist novel, partly achieved by slowing the pace and setting up 'a thin continuity line with a peasant boy, Julian, at the front and at home'.

The idea for **The Spanish Earth** had been hatched in July 1936 by a group of US intellectuals, including Lillian Hellman, John Dos Passos, Dorothy Parker, Archibald MacLeish and Hemingway. They hoped to change US Government policy and get the arms embargo on democratic Spain lifted.

When Ivens and his cinematographer John Ferno reached Madrid they were carrying a rough script devised in New York. This was soon abandoned. Ivens described the new format that developed under fire.

'People's Front. Madrid. A village. Farmer's family there. Collective work on an irrigation project. Fight on the front 25 kilometres away from the village. Bombardment. A young soldier, a peasant boy, fighting with his regiment in Madrid. The fascists fortified in the university. This boy on leave, his family, his village. He trains the village boys. Back to the front. Parallel between the irrigation project being completed, water to ***The Spanish Earth*** *and the fighting for the independence, the freedom of that earth.'*

The stakes were high and Spanish casualties were heavy. Young Julian disappeared, presumed dead even before the photography was completed.

Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt were among the film's first viewers. Roosevelt was sympathetic but made no commitment to lift the embargo. The big distributors and theatre chains wouldn't touch the film and censors caused their usual trouble. But eventually **The Spanish Earth** found sizeable audiences in the US and around the world, and activists had a magnificent vehicle for education and inspiration.

Since the premiere of **The Spanish Earth** hundreds of films have told stories of courageous people battling in far-off places in other good fights. Ivens himself went on to film in China, Indonesia, Cuba, Chile, and Vietnam. And in each situation he was able to mix emotion and political ideas, partisanship with art. Other documentary makers were not always as effective, or as fired up, or as subtle. But in the strongest works of international solidarity on film you can hear echoes of Ivens. ■

Peter Steven

The Spanish Earth *directed by Joris Ivens*

Curiosities

QUESTIONS THAT HAVE ALWAYS INTRIGUED YOU ABOUT THE WORLD WILL APPEAR IN THIS, YOUR SECTION, AND BE ANSWERED BY OTHER READERS. PLEASE ADDRESS YOUR ANSWERS AND QUESTIONS TO 'CURIOSITIES'.

Apart from lemmings and humans are there any other creatures that commit suicide?

● Lemmings do not commit suicide. It is now, I think, fairly well established that this is a myth. A BBC television show hosted by Danny Baker confirmed something I have heard elsewhere: a pioneer naturalist film-maker, trying to make a boring shoot more interesting, drove a population of lemmings over a cliff and filmed them. The film was incorporated into a cinema newsfilm and so became popular myth. Lemmings have no natural inclination to run over cliffs and this is not normally observed behaviour. They do make mass migrations when populations exceed food supplies.

I understand that in some species the female dies on giving birth and males may die after mating – implying that mating for such species could be construed as suicide. But all of this speculation is subject to our interpretation of animal free-will and self-awareness.

Andy Sutton
Nottingham, England

D Gold's inquiry brings to mind an interesting encounter I had a few years ago on the banks of the River Wye. A farmer was tethering the legs of a ewe whose lamb had recently fallen into the river and drowned. He explained to me that if he did not secure the ewe she would, in her grief, throw herself into the river. He appeared to be a sensible young man and I had no reason to doubt his words.

Richard Morley
Leominster, England.

A friend in Bahrain returned home one afternoon to find that a feral cat had given birth to a litter of kittens under the stairs leading to the flat roof of her single-storey house. Because the feral cats of Bahrain are so numerous and in such a pitiful condition she thought it kinder to dispose of most of the litter. This she did, whilst the mother was away, leaving just two. She was beside herself with the loss of most of her litter. She threw herself from the parapet of the house three times in rapid succession. Then, having failed in her presumed objective of ending her despair, she removed the two remaining kittens and disappeared.

C Chambers
Naremburn, Australia

AWAITING YOUR ANSWERS

Is there an organization that recycles computers and/or small electrical goods?

Cathie Jenkins
London, England

Does anyone know how the Chinese custom of foot-binding originated?

PM Tammik
Malaga, Spain

What problems are Western tobacco companies causing in Third World countries?

Mike Scholand
Potters Bar, England

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR ANSWERS PLEASE SEND THEM TO **CURIOSITIES, NEW INTERNATIONALIST, 55 RECTORY ROAD, OXFORD OX4 1BW, UK,** OR TO YOUR LOCAL NI OFFICE (SEE INSIDE FRONT COVER FOR ADDRESSES).

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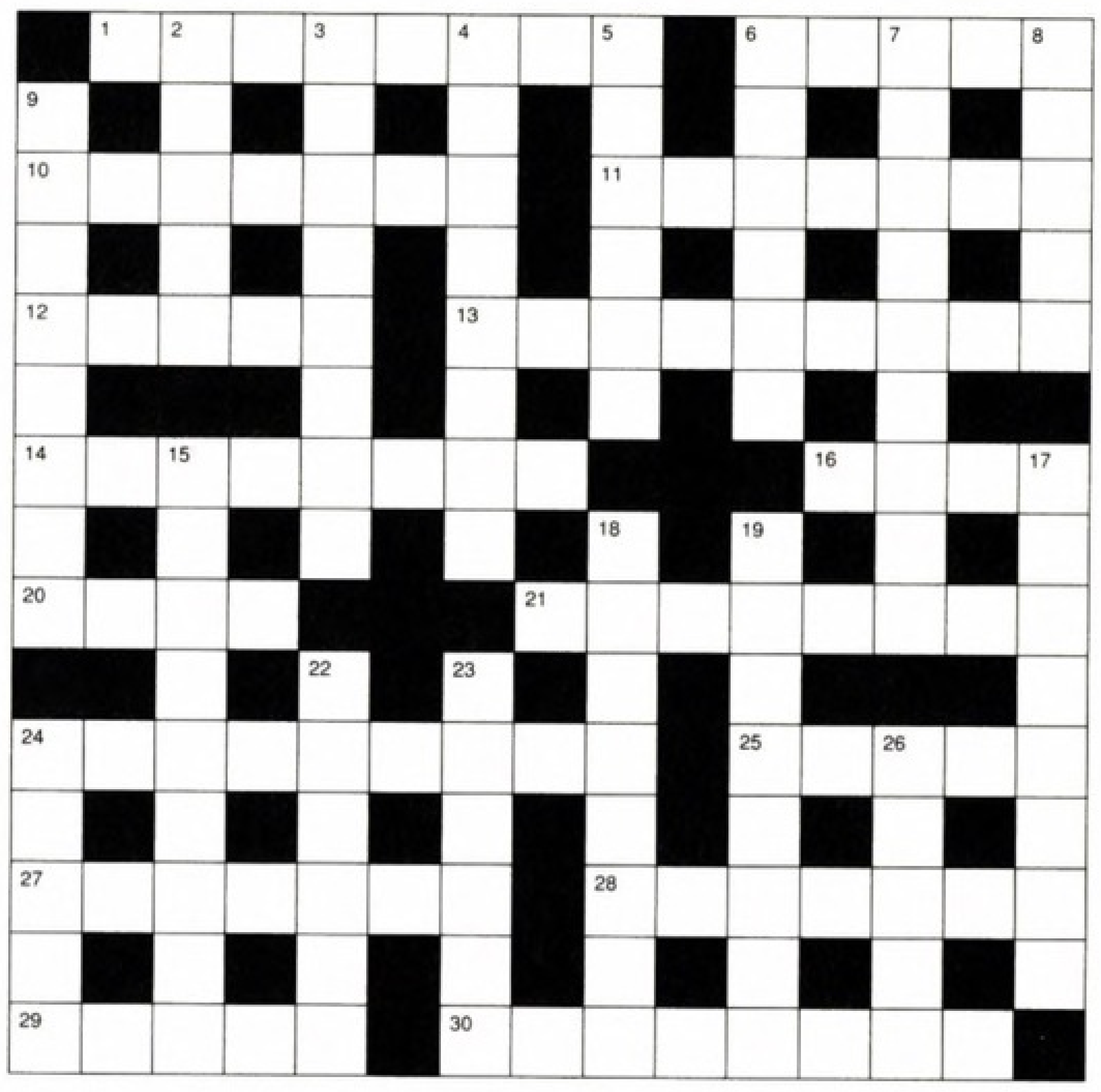
The **NI** Crossword

No. 1 by **Axe**



CRYPTIC

Across
1 Deterrent from a Mafia initiative extremely grave (4,4)
6 UN began to be involved in shut out of Africans (5)
10 Pity about the code (7)
11 The original American Dream in tatters (7)
12,13 A number of hogs find mother soon to cross the Yangtze (5,6,3)
14 Feedback is right, but odd one about the start of the play (8)
16 Den is a dreadful liar (4)
20 Commercial computer technology is mine (4)
21 It sprouts in West Africa; special locale at a forest opening (4,4)
24 Katanga, Zaire's possession of clear enclave (4,5)
25 Gaul experiencing problems with the last leaving camp (5)
27 Article in the constitution of secret societies exposes Pacific people (7)
28 Family title derived when I left ex-Dutch Guiana and headed east (7)
29 Fibre is put in salad without publicity (5)
30 Mahdi, or a poor amateur? (5,3)

Down
2 Massachusetts Institute of Technology backing for missing head of island (5)
3 Egyptologist partner about to tire badly (8)
4 Run wild in charge of farm (8)
5 Negotiate a fair bargain to start with in civil war here (6)
6 Heard, he did, and understood (6)
7 Bronze position standard is mediocre (5-4)
8 Doctor raised under operating system up at old city (5)
9 Re-tap Rio potential to establish capital (8)
15 Professor is digesting the last letter to sign about deserts (4,5)
17 Those who flee from Manchu, for example, are coming back in. He predicts about-face (8)
18 Arranged together? (8)
19 Orang, A OK! Funny animal (8)
22 Setback part of a clear single-mindedness of this country? (6)
23 It eradicates the lead - at least on paper (6)
24 People who involved ghost-writing (5)
26 Los Angeles has internal provision of capital (5)

SOLUTION NEXT MONTH

QUICK

Across
1 The end-product of the Manhattan Project (4,4)
6 Natives of East-Central Africa (5)
10 Deep regret (7)
11 A portmanteau word generalizing North American natives (7)
12,13 20-year-long plan to provide hydro-electric resources on the Yangtze (5,6,3)
14 An immediate impression (8)
16 Animal hideout (4)
20 Mine shaft usually sunk horizontally into a hillside (4)
21 Produced by tropical plant important for caffeine and flavouring (4,4)
24 Newly autonomous Palestinian homeland (4,5)
25 One of Stalin's work camps (5)
27 Inhabitants of the Friendly Islands, capital Nuku'alofa (7)
28 Hereditary or common title (7)
29 Plant, used in rope-making, whose name derives from a port on the Yucatan (5)
30 Short-wave enthusiast? (5,3)

Down
2 Troubled island, part of the Lesser Sunda group (5)
3 Nineteenth-century French Egyptologist, famous for his work involving the Sphinx (8)
4 Spread too much (8)
5 Scene of West African civil war in the 1960s (6)
6 Paid attention to (6)
7 Of poor quality, low-grade (5-4)
8 Biblical city destroyed by fire and brimstone (5)
9 Administrative capital of South Africa (8)
15 Deserts as depicted on maps of world climate (4,4)
17 The displaced peoples of conflict (8)
18 Calm and collected (8)
19 Unofficial court of law (8)
22 Nation originally formed after the death of Solomon - its first ruler was Jeroboam (6)
23 Implement used to correct mistakes in drawing or writing (6)
24 Germanic barbarians who sacked Rome in 410 AD (5)
26 The world's highest capital city (if fully autonomous) (5)

ENDPIECE

The Ark

How the comfortable life of **Rod Isaacs** came to be discarded.

Joseph is a nuisance, it's true. He sleeps on the street, half-a-dozen cans of lager hidden in his overcoat. He pesters people for money. He steals. But people love him. They cannot resist his charm, his shameless begging, his capacity to weep and rejoice. With unerring regularity he is brought clothes, Walkmans and Bibles (he generally loses one a week) plus the occasional can of beer.

His Christianity is a blend of childhood Catholicism and street preaching learnt from the local Pentecostal church. In fact, Joseph preaches to the people from whom he is begging: 'All your money and all your fancy clothes won't get you into the Kingdom of Heaven!' He's right of course, but coming from a chronic alcoholic whose flies are undone, it's a bit hard to take.

People like Joseph have always somehow 'spoken' to me. It was not just a matter of their obvious need but also the challenge they posed. It seemed to tie in with my becoming a Christian – which I finally did at the age of 23 after years of anxious questioning. Whatever else I believed about Christ, he was not just a nice bloke who had a few useful ideas. As a priest once commented in a sermon I heard: 'Jesus came to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.'

When I first moved to London I was certainly comfortable, materially speaking. I was working as a sub-editor for *South*, a monthly current-affairs magazine focused on the countries of the southern hemisphere. We had offices in Piccadilly. I owned my own flat and a car.

All of this was enjoyable and worthwhile, but I was not entirely at ease. I had to recognize that, however much I enjoyed writing, discussing, gathering information, I had another, deeper need – to be in contact with people directly, and that meant sacrificing a certain distance which is essential to good journalism.

I latched on to teaching as a possible answer and found myself a job. I think I felt pleased with myself; teaching was a 'worthy' job that really changed people's lives, and I was full of boundless enthusiasm. But schools are run on boundaries – they have to be – and for me the boundary between pupil and teacher was an uncomfortable one.

What was I to do? I had no idea, except that I wanted to face my fellow human beings. I think it was this rather crude desire that led me to visit L'Arche –'The Ark'. The community is comprised of over 100 homes worldwide where people with mental handicaps and helpers share their lives and work. These homes are not like residential communities but like any family home where people eat, work, struggle, relax and celebrate together. It was this above all that attracted me; I wanted to be alongside people, not confronting them or working on their behalf.

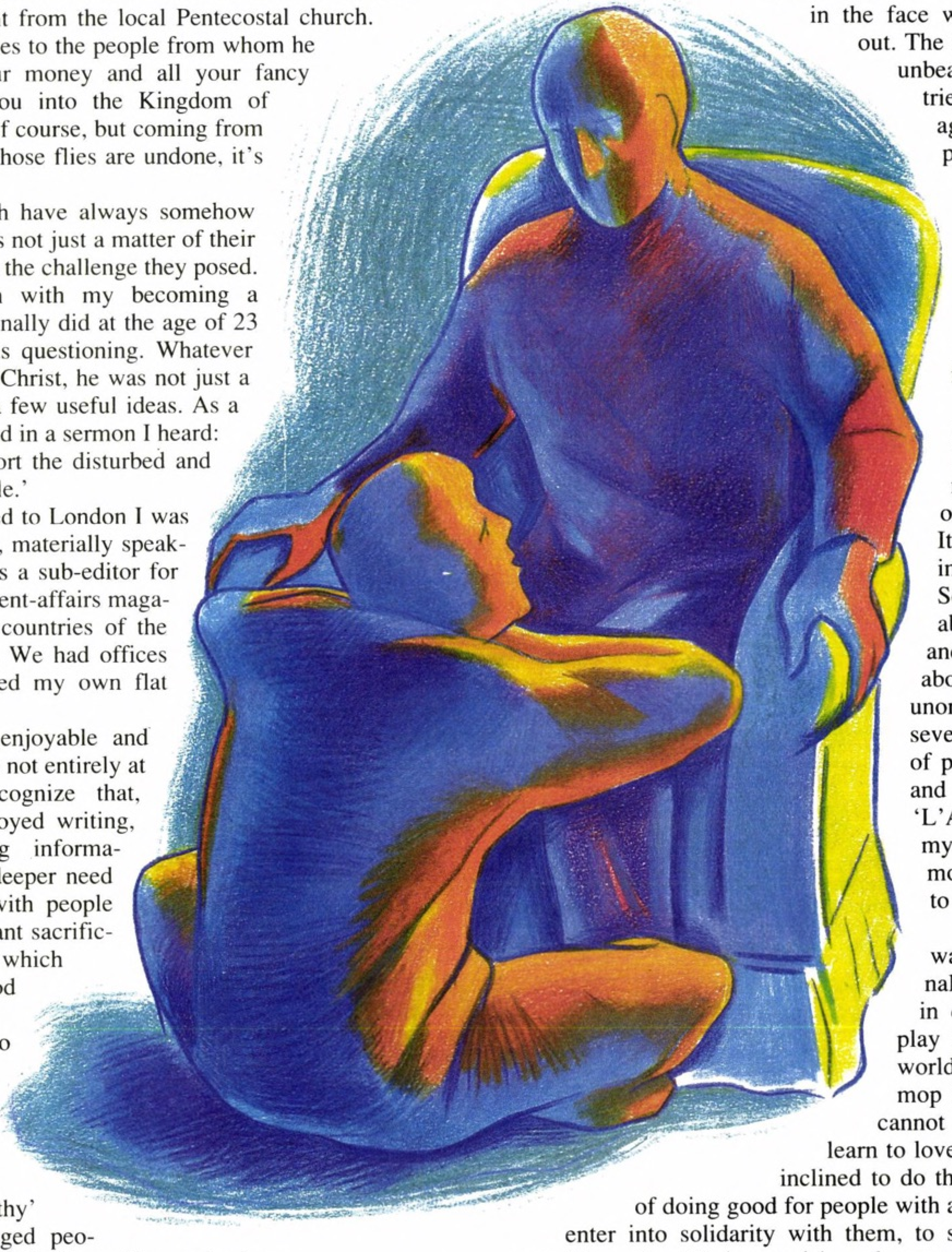


ILLUSTRATION: SARAH JOHN

In the village in northern France where L'Arche was first founded there are a dozen houses. One of these is for people who need considerable support. Many are in wheelchairs and cannot feed or clothe themselves. I sat, one meal-time, next to a man called Loic. He was striking himself in the face with his fist and crying out. The intensity of anguish was unbearable. When anyone tried to stop him, he started again. I felt an anger and panic rising in me. I wanted to grab him and make him stop. I was horrified at the violence I felt towards him. I did not want to share his anguish but to eradicate it, to stamp it out.

Faced with this, I realized things would have to change within me. I could not conceive of living this kind of life. It took a month-long spell in a hermit community in Scotland before I was able to commit myself – and even then it came about by an entirely unorthodox process. I had seven ideas written on bits of paper. I prayed like mad and picked one. It read 'L'Arche' – and I knew in my bones it was what I most wanted and needed to do.

So, five years ago I was an eager young journalist, wanting to engage in development issues and play my part in 'saving the world'. Now I am going to mop floors, feed people who cannot feed themselves and learn to love them. I know I am disinclined to do this. I might like the idea of doing good for people with a mental handicap, but to enter into solidarity with them, to share their daily life, is something else. Their anguish and anger scares me, their needs overwhelm me, their uncluttered approach to the human heart shames me.

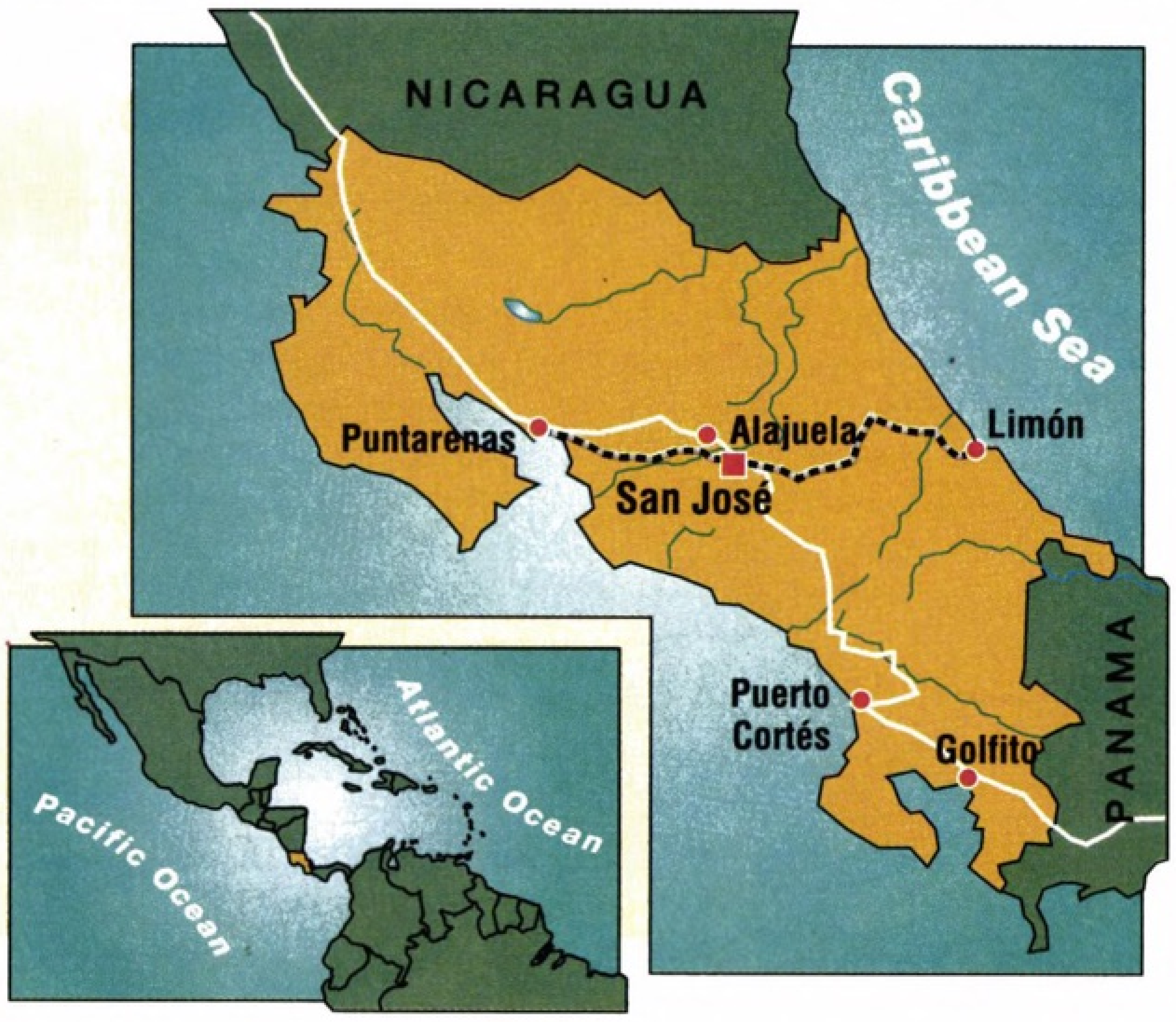
On that same visit to the L'Arche community, I met Christophe. When I entered the living room he got up from the floor where he was sitting and without saying a word (he cannot speak) came towards me, took me by both hands, led me to an armchair and sat me down. Then he sat cross-legged on the floor, put his arms across my knees and his head on top and grinned up at me with a smile of total acceptance. It was wonderful – and I had done nothing. ■

Country profile

Costa Rica

COSTA RICA doesn't feel like a Central American republic. People worry about mortgages rather than death squads; taxi drivers remind you to fasten your seat belt. Strolling around a busy shopping mall at the weekend, you could have been transported to suburbville, USA.

The 'Switzerland of Central America' gained its enviable reputation for stability, even dullness, by taking the inspired step of abolishing the army in 1948, embarking on a three-decade love affair with the welfare state which left Costa Ricans better fed, educated and healthier than almost any other nation in Latin America. Pensions and social security cover most of the population. While other Central American regimes called in the army at the first sign of opposition, Costa Rica's governments generally preferred to compromise and listen to pressures from below – though they were occasionally prepared to use force to crush independent opposition.



By the early 1980s, however, the welfare-state bubble was ready to burst. Governments had covered growing deficits by borrowing abroad, precipitating a debt crisis in the early 1980s which forced Costa Rica into the arms of the IMF and World Bank and their free-market programme of 'structural adjustment'. In return for their support, Costa Rica rapidly became a model adjuster, cutting state spending and shifting the emphasis from the public sector to private enterprise, using massive tax breaks to encourage multinational companies to export fruit, vegetables and textiles.

The result was an export boom, at the cost of the erosion of many of the gains made since 1948. Costa Rica is starting to look Central American again. Inequality is on the rise, as the burgeoning private-health and education sectors skim off wealthy citizens from the state system, and the Government cuts social support for the poor. As Costa Rica polarizes, malnutrition and obesity are both on the rise. A more positive angle to 'Central Americanization' is the recent growth of independent peasant and trade-union movements.

One of the growth areas of the economy is tourism, which is attracting large numbers of eco-tourists to the country's world-famous system of national parks and forest reserves. But the country is an environmental Jekyll and Hyde. Despite its record on conservation, it has one of the highest deforestation rates in the world, as much of its rainforest is hacked down for cattle ranching and the 'hamburger connection', sending convoys of refrigerated containers northwards to the fast-food chains of the US. Other exports, such as bananas, have seriously damaged the environment by dumping tons of pesticides into the waterways.

Pessimists fear that unleashing market forces will destroy the Costa Rican model, turning it into just another Central American economic and social 'basket case'. The country's fate hinges on its ability to keep the IMF and other creditors and investors happy (or at least at bay), while responding to the growing public opposition to structural adjustment, especially privatization. The signs are that the Government is at least trying to attempt this difficult balancing act – President Figueres recently suspended the privatization programme in response to a wave of strikes and protests. ■

Duncan Green

AT A GLANCE

JON MITCHELL / PANOS PICTURES

Leader President José María Figueres

Economy GNP per capita $2,150 (US $24,740)
Monetary Unit: Colón
Main exports: Bananas, tourism, coffee, garments. Bananas and tourism make up over half export earnings.
Main imports: Primary commodities (49%), consumer goods (22%).
External debt: $4.5 billion, or $1,360 per man, woman and child

People 3.4 million. Population growth rate: 2.7% per annum.

Health Infant mortality is 14 per 1,000 live births, approaching rich-world standards and just a quarter that in neighbouring Nicaragua.

Culture Overwhelmingly white and mixed race (*mestizo*). A small (30,000) indigenous population live on 22 government reserves, while black Afro-Caribbean people on the Caribbean coast make up a further 2% of the population.
Religion: Roman Catholicism is dominant. Although the number of protestant evangelical sects is spreading, they have made nowhere near the same progress as in Honduras or Guatemala.
Languages: Spanish, plus some indigenous languages

Sources *World Development Report 1995*, World Bank; Economist Intelligence Unit; CEPAL Panorama Económica de América Latina; *Inside Costa Rica*; *The State of the World's Children 1996*, UNICEF; *Americas Review 1996*.

Previously profiled September 1983

NI star rating

EXCELLENT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
FAIR	★★★
POOR	★★
APPALLING	★

STAR RATINGS

INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★★
Good by Latin American standards, but worsening under the impact of structural adjustment
1983 ★★★★

LITERACY ★★★★★
93% for both adult men and women. One of the highest in the hemisphere.
1983 ★★★★★

SELF-RELIANCE ★★
Food security has been abandoned in the pursuit of export markets for bananas and pineapples. Heavily reliant on the IMF and World Bank.
1983 ★★

FREEDOM ★★★★
Minor human-rights abuses in a stable democracy underwritten by the abolition of the military in 1948.
1983 ★★★★

POSITION OF WOMEN ★★★★
Some of the most advanced legislation in the Americas, including laws against the sexist use of women's bodies in advertising.
1983 ★★

LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★★★★
76 years - the same as in the UK and the US, and one year higher than Aotearoa/New Zealand.
1983 ★★★★★

POLITICS

NI ASSESSMENT ★★★★
A stable democracy in which governments are willing to listen and compromise to preserve social stability. There is little ideological difference between the ruling National Liberation Party and the opposition Social Christian Unity Party. Party leaderships are dominated by political families like the Calderons and Figueres.

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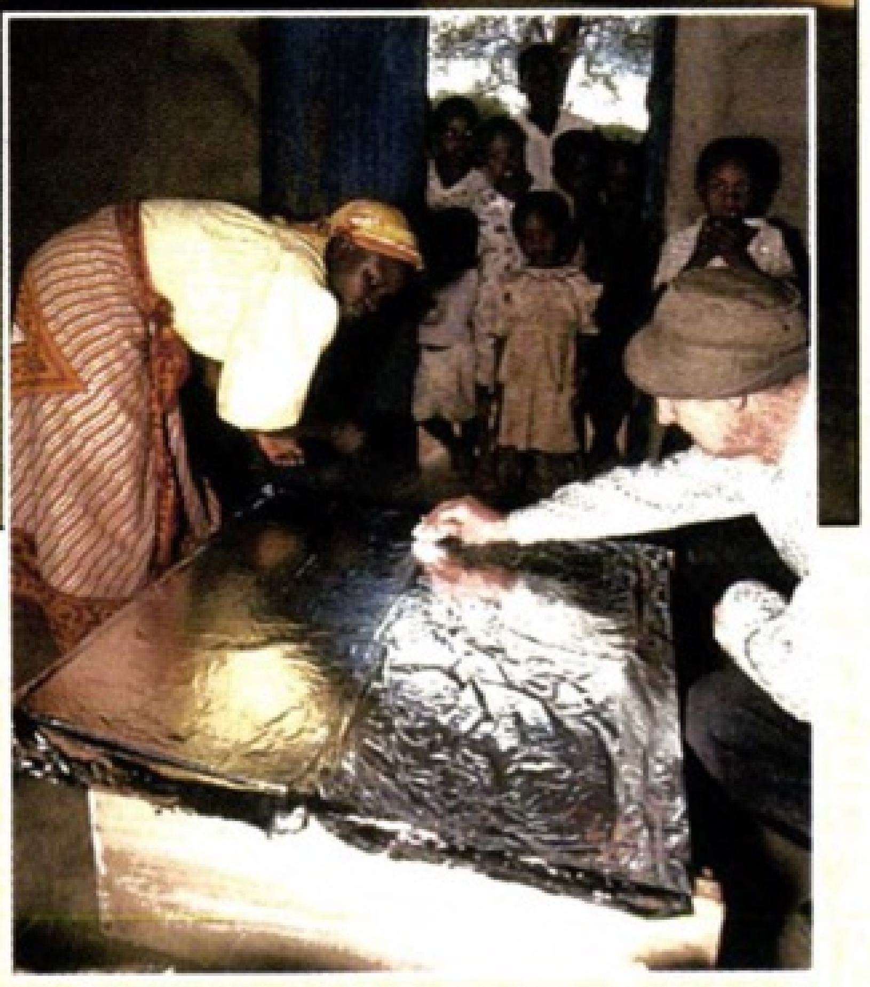

Barrie Callow, a science teacher from Stockport helps design and build a Solar oven with Patronilla Mukai Munyohi in her village in rural Kenya.

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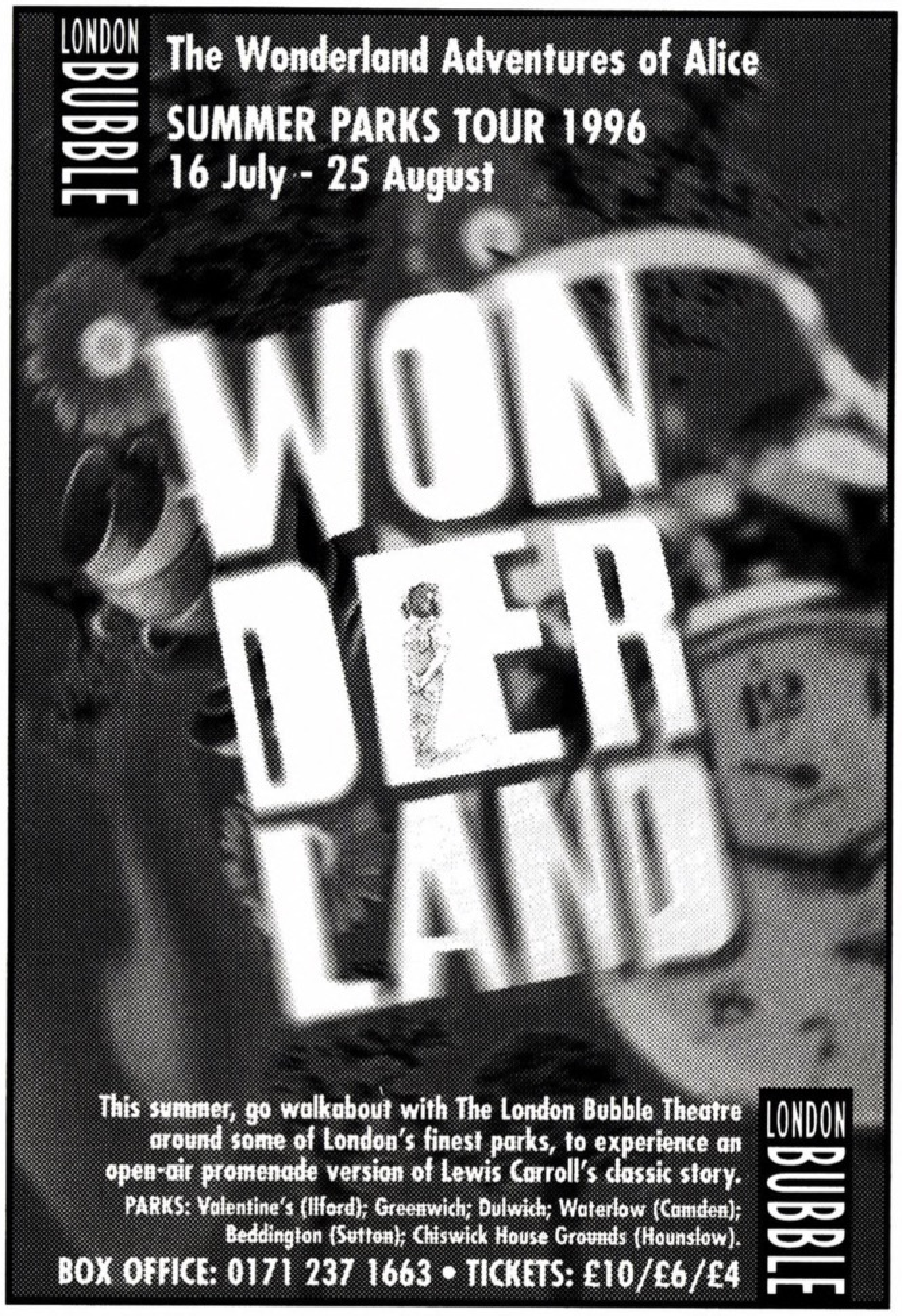

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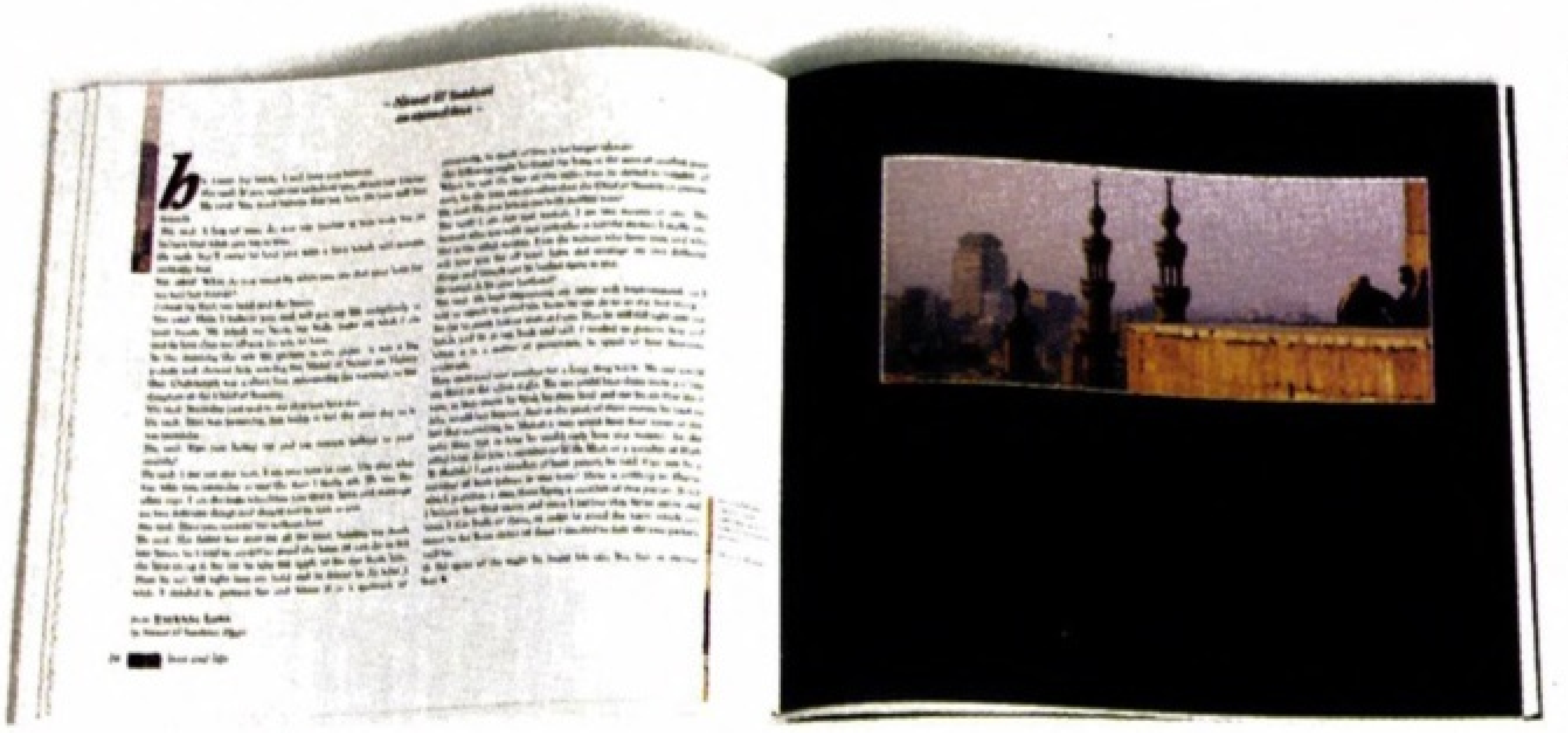

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